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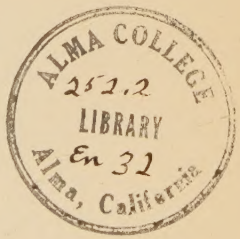
BY

EDMUND ENGLISH

CANON OF WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL AND MISSIONARY RECTOR OF ST. JAMES'S, TWICKENHAM



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Dedication

TO THE

CONGREGATION OF ST. JAMES'S CHURCH,

TWICKENHAM,

WHO, FOR MORE THAN TWENTY-FIVE YEARS,

HAVE LISTENED WITH UNWEARIED INTEREST

AND UNFAILING SYMPATHY

TO THE SAME VOICE

DELIVERING ITS FAMILIAR MESSAGE,

THESE PAGES ARE AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

PREFACE

THE contents of the following pages were, with two exceptions, preached in the parochial Church of St. James's, Twickenham. The last two addresses were given in the course of a short retreat to the ecclesiastical students at St. Edmund's College, Ware.

It is hoped that their publication may serve some useful purpose. Perhaps they may, to some extent, attain their chief aim, which was to promote clearness of thought in matters of doctrine, and in practical matters to provide a fresh setting for those venerable principles of the spiritual life which have been handed down in the tradition of the Church.

I have to thank the Committee of the Catholic Truth Society for permission to include in this volume Nos. VI and XIV, which were originally published separately by them.

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I.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

"Magnificat anima mea Dominum, et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo."

"My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."—Luke I. 46, 47.

I. In the first beginning of the world, when the Divine order and harmony of creation were unbroken, we are told that God looked upon the work of His hands, and "saw that it was good". Adam, standing at the head of that creation, voiced its praise and worship, and as it is written in the book of Job, "the morning stars praised Me together, and all the sons of God made a joyful melody".[1] There is an unconscious praise and worship which even the irrational works of God offer to Him, in their undeviating courses and their exact fulfilment of the laws imposed upon them. Thus the words of the Canticle, "All ye works of the Lord, bless the Lord: praise

[1] Job xxxviii. 7.

and exalt Him above all for ever ".[1] But when sin came this " Magnificat " of creation was rudely broken. The shadow of God's anger rested upon the earth, the sentence of condemnation fell upon all things human, and the only fitting word that man could speak was not so much a hymn of praise, as a cry of contrition. Sin and death passed down from generation to generation, and the psalm " Miserere " gave best utterance to the heart and soul of man in its relation to the offended majesty of God.

But one point of brightness relieves the gloom of this history of sin and rebellion. Human nature had formed with the fallen angel that tempted it a fellowship in sin : an impious alliance in its disobedience and rebelliousness against God. Sin may be generally described as a partnership with the devil in his revolt against the will of God. But in one great instance that confederacy in evil between man and Satan was destined to be broken. When the great promise of deliverance was made, the royal decree went forth, " I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed ".[2] Thus God spoke to the serpent. Since the serpent had formed by sin his bond of friendship with man, and parted him from God who made

[1] Dan. III. 57. [2] Gen. III. 15.

him, God decrees that there shall be one chosen from the race who shall hold no fellowship with Satan, who shall enter into no truce, but rather maintain irreconcilable war with him and his seed. The first Eve is chosen by Satan as his ally for the marring of God's gracious design. The second Eve is divinely chosen to be the enemy of Satan and the sacred instrument of God for the accomplishment of another and still greater design of "plenteous redemption".[1]

When our Lord used the words, "The prince of this world cometh, and in Me he hath not anything,"[2] He meant that there was no sin to be found in Him. Similarly, when the second Eve is so placed by God at variance with Satan, as that she can have no link of union with him such as the first Eve had, it may be said of her that the prince of this world hath not anything in her. Warfare with the devil, a unity of cause between "the woman and her seed," as against the serpent and his seed, can only mean on the part of her who is thus bound up with Christ sinlessness and grace. Such is Mary's position as defined by that first decree spoken by God in Eden. When in the fullness of time a message is sent from on high by the mouth of the angel,

[1] Ps. cxxix. 7. [2] Job xiv. 30.

all the words that are spoken enforce more clearly this exceptional privilege and this predestined election of Mary, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women".[1] The blessedness attributed to her is pre-eminent, she is peerless amongst the children of Adam. Similarly, when Elizabeth, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, cries out with a loud voice, she joins together in a community of blessedness the woman and her seed, just as they had been joined together from the beginning. "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb." Then with a due sense of the dignity of her to whom she spoke, she added the words, "Whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"[2]

When, again, the spirit of prophecy moved the soul of Simeon, and he announced at the presentation of our Lord in the Temple the future conflict and contradiction awaiting the Saviour of men, he too joins together in warfare and in suffering the Son and the Mother. "This child is set for the fall and the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted, and thine own soul a sword shall pierce."[3] When we turn to the final vision which closes the message of the New Testament, the Apostle

[1] Luke I. 28. [2] Luke I. 42, 43. [3] Luke II. 34, 35.

pictures to us the same conjunction in warfare of the woman and her Son as against the spirit of evil, that had been announced from the first. "A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. . . . And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to be delivered; that, when she should be delivered, he might devour her Son. . . . And he persecuted the woman who brought forth the man-child."[1] Seeing in that vision a double reference to Mary, the Mother of God, and to the Church, the mother of the sons of God, St. Augustine says:[2] "There is no one but knows that the dragon is the devil. The woman represents the Virgin Mary, who in holiness brought forth our all-holy Head, who also displays in her own person a figure of holy Church; inasmuch as she, a virgin, bringeth forth her Son, so doth this other, at all times without prejudice to her virginity, beget members to the body of that Son." Thus consistently from beginning to end of the inspired books, Mary's place in connexion with the mystery of the Incarnation is declared. She is indissolubly joined in the promise and its

[1] Apoc. XII. 1, 4, 13.

[2] "Tractatus de Symbolo, ad Catachumenos," Lib. IV, c. 1.

fulfilment with the Saviour of men, as the chosen instrument of His merciful design, as the sharer with Him in His warfare against sin, as the chief partaker of that blessedness which went out from Him to men. When the poet sang of her,[1]

> Purer than foam on central ocean toss'd,
> Our tainted nature's solitary boast,

the last words are no mere figure of imagination, but faithfully express the great truth signified by the Immaculate Conception. For what is it that is defined by the Church as the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception? Not indeed that Mary had anything of herself superhuman, as though she needed not the redemption of Christ, or His justifying grace, but that by a more bountiful application of the merits of the Cross she was preserved from falling under the stain of sin, just as others by a more common grace are raised up again after their fall. The grace that comes to the ordinary Christian in baptism to restore his soul to God, came to her in the first moment of her being to unite her soul to God, and to preserve her untarnished from sin and evil. Her gift of deliverance, her dower of grace, left her indeed more than others indebted to the bounty and predilection of God. It is just that sense of indebtedness that is expressed in the "Magnificat,"

[1] Wordsworth, "Ecc. Sonnets," Pt. II, 25.

when her soul magnifies the Lord and her spirit rejoices in God, her Saviour. "Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me: and holy is His name."[1]

Those "great things" that were wrought in her behalf were not indeed favours in the order of nature, or gifts of things most precious amongst the treasures of earth. "All the glory of the king's daughter is within."[2] Having nothing from earth, she is destined to possess all things heavenly in such profusion of grace as befits one who, for her Son's sake, is blessed above all. She is destined to be the living shrine of the divinity upon earth, and of the dwelling-place of the Most High it is written, "Holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, unto length of days".[3] As the Psalmist once more sings, "The Most High hath sanctified His own tabernacle. God is in the midst thereof, it shall not be moved: God will help it in the morning early."[4] In the early morning of life, in the first moment of her being, God helped and sanctified His living tabernacle; and Mary is, by reason of her lofty vocation to a Divine maternity, both shielded from sin and filled with all grace.

II. There is a typical instance, in Mary's life,

[1] Luke i. 49. [2] Ps. xliv. 14.
[3] Ps. xcii. 5. [4] Ps. xlv. 5, 6.

of the manner in which that grace which put her at enmity with the spirit of evil showed itself. The opening scene in the history of the Incarnation is the solemn interview of Mary with the angel. It is the direct and absolute antithesis to that first scene in the Old Testament, the interview between Eve and the fallen spirit which ended in the tragedy of man's fall. The Divine work of redemption was destined to be the counterpart to that of spiritual destruction. A second Eve, according to the great prediction, figures as the counterpart to the first; and all unconsciously this new representative of the dispensation of grace discloses the virtues which are directly contrary to the vices revealed in the original fall.

1. It is a striking fact that immediately after Mary's interview with the angel, Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Ghost, on seeing her said, "Blessed art thou that hast believed".[1] It is equally remarkable that in the story of the first revolt against God, the human heart began its aberrations by rejecting the duty of faith in the Divine word, and yielding to the flattering falsehood which contradicted that word. The first step taken in the direction of sin was the weak surrender of faith. The stern warning of the Divine

[1] Luke 1. 45.

voice had declared, "In what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death".[1] The insidious voice of the tempter, falsely contradicting, said, "No, you shall not die the death, . . . you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil".[2]

It would appear that the first element of evil introduced into the world was the failure of faith to meet the test to which it was put. That first experience has been but too often repeated in the spiritual history of men. Faith adheres to the invisible things of the present and the hidden realities of the future; falsehood spreads its rainbow hues over the things visible and present, wholly shutting out the great realities of the future. Faith is the decisive act by which preference is given to truths that appear not, rather than to the things that are seen. Both will and intellect, heart and mind, have their share in it. The act of faith is not simply an operation of the enlightened intellect; it is also a discipline of the filial will. Conversely, it may be said that falsehood which makes no appeal to the will is shorn of most of its dangers. In homage to the infinite Truth, faith masters the eager instinct to grasp at the present, in the patient expectation of the better things that await it in the future. It chooses with God to subordinate time to eternity. In its

[1] Gen. II. 17. [2] Gen. III. 4, 5.

firmness of purpose, it is not to be shaken, or deceived, or disturbed by any glamour of apparent truth that the vision of sense may present to it. Thus in contrast to the first Eve, Mary in her interview with the angel, reveals the faith that shows these high qualities and leads to the loftiest favours of God. She puts indeed the single question, as to how the message of the angel was compatible with that estate of virginity which she had chosen. But when he declares that the Most High should accomplish in His own way all that had been announced, in that one decisive word of Truth, faith found its all-sufficient satisfaction and repose. The wonders of a virginal conception, which appear to create so great a stone of stumbling to the imperfect faith of others, raised no difficulty for her unswerving allegiance to the word of God. Faith has its hard sayings, but Mary teaches us how the loyal worship offered by mind and heart to the eternal Truth meets the trials to which it may be exposed. Faith bows its head and humbly accepts the word that is spoken, whether the Divine utterance be in terms that are plain to human understanding, or in mysteries that are above it.

It was fitting that a great act of faith should mark the opening of that new dispensation brought to the world in the mystery of the In-

carnation. Thus it is we have the happy contrast, in Mary's interview with the angel, between the second and the first Eve. In the inspired words of Elizabeth, faith is declared to be the preliminary need for the solemn fulfilment of the great promise, the final condition of its due accomplishment. "Blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished in thee which were spoken by the Lord."

2. Equally striking in the first scene of the new dispensation, is the humility that distinguishes it, in contrast to the pride so conspicuous as the motive suggested by the tempter for the original fall. Here, in a singular manner, the second Eve stands out in glorious contradistinction to the first. It was sufficient for the first that the tempter should suggest the thought, "You shall be as gods, knowing good and evil". There is indeed a strange subtlety in that pride which seems to be hidden somewhere, as a dormant possibility, within the recesses of every creature's being. Its potency for evil, when aroused, is only too familiar an experience to all. Strange indeed it is that minds enlightened by the highest graces should fall victims to its deceitfulness, and become as blind instruments of a stricken folly. Still more strange is it that not merely in paradise amongst men, but in the first heavens

amongst the angels, the potency of pride to create evil was but too clearly made manifest. The very suggestion made to men, "Ye shall be as gods," goes far to prove what was the nature of the sin committed by the first-born amongst God's creatures in their heavenly paradise, inasmuch as the tempter must have known, from his own spiritual experience, what a power for evil was in that thought, what a danger lurked in that motive to a nature as yet unacquainted with sin. The rarer and more wonderful the gifts bestowed, the more subtle and formidable the danger would appear to be, which such flattering self-contemplation brought with it.

But in Mary's interview with Gabriel, all such tendency to rest in the greatness of the gifts, rather than in that of the Giver, finds no place. The praise of the angel, contained in the first words addressed to her, rouses only into full life and spiritual prominence the deep humility which gave perfection and harmony to all the virtues of her soul. St. Luke's words are, "Who having heard, was troubled at his saying, and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be".[1] It is a wonderful contrast of shrinking fidelity to God, and fear of offending Him, as compared with the intoxication of human pride

[1] Luke i. 29.

and quick forgetfulness of duty brought by the thought, "You shall be as gods". If ever human nature appeared at variance with the spirit of sin, if ever it showed itself divinely freed from every trail of the serpent, if ever there were "enmities" between one and the other, surely it was in that interview in which Mary's humility feared to hear its own praise, even though the angel of the Lord spoke it. All that angels and men could say of her inspired only the thoughts contained in her Magnificat, thoughts of self-abasement in the contemplation of the gifts received, of joyous praise and thanksgiving to the divine Author of the greatness bestowed upon her. "He hath regarded the lowliness of His handmaid" is the expression of that humility which was destined to be the means of recovering all that pride had lost.

3. Lastly, the spirit of revolt against the Divine Law, which is the issue of Eve's interview with Satan, finds its counterpart in the ideal of Christian obedience expressed in the words, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to Thy word".[1] With Mary the one single question actuating every movement of her soul was, "Does God so will it?" Her question to the angel only expressed

[1] Luke i. 38.

the fear of a sensitive conscience, as to how far the honours announced to her were compatible with the will and design of God, which had seemed to lead her in another direction. When assured that God had so ordained, that no word was impossible with Him, she at once proclaims her worship of His Divine will, and gives expression to that watchword of Christian obedience, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord". If the spirit of revolt had in the beginning broken the harmony of creation by resistance to the will of God, Mary represents that principle of loving obedience which seeks to make earth join together with heaven for the accomplishment of that will.

The glory of one great act of Divine obedience was destined to redeem and enlighten the world. In the dawn of the Incarnation the soul of Mary caught the reflection of that Divine light, and the spirit of obedience to the will of God shines out in all her words and acts. If the first disobedience brought with it the darkness of a long spiritual night, Mary's homage of obedience to the Divine will ushers in the brightness of the new day of hope and salvation.

It was fitting that she who was so closely united to her Divine Son in prophecy and fulfilment should give us practical lessons, by the

light of her own example, in those virtues which He came to teach. It is fitting, too, that we should ask her, as one whose intercession is so capable of rendering us precious help, to assist us in our efforts to learn from Him that spirit with which He inspired her. It is fitting that we should seek her aid in that warfare which we are called to wage with the spirit of sin, that she may obtain for us to be strong in faith, deep-rooted in humility and loyal in obedience, as becomes His worthy disciples. May she enable us by her sinless intercession to inherit some portion of her spiritual treasure, to share with her hereafter in that glory of which the Apostle spoke when he saw her as a great sign appearing in heaven.

II.

THE TWOFOLD GENERATION OF THE ETERNAL WORD.

Sunday after Christmas Day.

"Tecum principium in die virtutis Tuae, in splendoribus sanctorum: ex utero ante luciferum genui Te."

"With Thee is the principality in the day of Thy strength: in the brightness of the saints: from the womb before the day-star I begot Thee."—Ps. cix. 3.

The mystery of the Incarnation is a great unfolding of the attributes and the ways of God. It has so many lessons to give us that it would be wrong to think we can in one day, or at any one time, or number of times, exhaust them. To-day therefore I propose to dwell upon one special aspect of the same great subject that must fill our minds, and let us hope, preoccupy our hearts throughout this happy season. The point I propose for consideration, with a view to more fully realizing the great event of Bethlehem, is the strange contrast that is presented in the two generations of the Eternal Word.

There is that which is spoken of in the Nicene Creed in the words, "Born of the Father before all ages, God of God, light of light, true God of true God; begotten, not made; consubstantial with the Father". Again, there is that which we commemorate at Christmastide, expressed in the words of the Apostles' Creed, "Conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary". The glory of the one is to us as inconceivably great as is the immeasurable humility of the other. Both are full of mystery. Of both one and the other the prophet's words may be spoken, "Who shall declare His generation?"[1]

I. The eternal generation of the Son from the Father denotes that mysterious Divine relation subsisting between the first and second Persons of the Blessed Trinity, whereby the first is truly the Eternal Father, and the second His Eternal Son, distinct as Persons, one as God. Our human thought cannot hope to penetrate that highest of all mysteries. When Moses of old prayed, "Show me Thy face, that I may know Thee," he was answered by the words which tell us of the law of our human limitation, "Thou canst not see My face; for man shall not see Me and live".[2] What was said of mortal eye is

[1] Is. LIII. 8. [2] Exod. XXXIII. 20.

also true of mortal mind. Indeed, there must ever be mystery where neither outward sense nor inner spirit can conceive the mighty things presented to them in the perfections of Him who is infinite. Yet we may humbly, and under the guidance of faith, endeavour to represent to ourselves some faint idea of that first fact of faith, the Divine relation subsisting between the eternal Father and Him who is called "the splendour of His glory and the figure of His substance".[1]

It is necessary, indeed, as a preliminary safeguard, to put away from our thoughts all idea of limitation and imperfection, such as attaches naturally to created things. Finite minds are wont to conceive the union existing between father and son, as conditioned by time and necessitating succession, one as necessarily pre-existent to the other. But with Him who transcends all time, inasmuch as He created it, whose pure spiritual essence is eternal, whose Being is infinite, we must eliminate from our conception all that carries with it the limitations of time, or the marks of imperfection. We may think of the Divine Nature as of an infinite mind, absolute in its perfections, finding adequate expression in thought; that thought great as the Divine mind is great, perfect as it is perfect. In this eternal

[1] Heb. i. 3.

act of Divine consciousness there is generated the Word, which is the perfect reflex of the Divine intelligence. This eternal generation is inseparable from God's very existence, and by it is established the august relation subsisting between the Father who begets and the Word who is begotten. Indivisible in nature, yet distinct in relation each to other, of the Eternal Word it is written that He is "the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him".[1] Thus, after a more sublime manner, incomprehensible to us, the Divine generation of the Eternal Word takes place, as light issuing from light, glory from glory.

It was in reference to this that the Psalmist used the words of the text, "In the brightness of the saints; from the womb before the day-star I begot Thee". Before the day-star ever shone, before the world it enlightens was ever formed, there was that mystery ever ancient, ever new, of the eternal Divine relation subsisting between the Father and the Son, "in the splendours of the holy place," where dwells "in light inaccessible"[2] the supreme majesty of God. What the Psalmist said of that eternal generation St. John repeats in the sublime exordium of his gospel, when he says, "In the beginning was the Word,

[1] John I. 18. [2] 1 Tim. VI. 16.

and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was made nothing that was made."[1] In the long ages of eternity, before aught was drawn from out the void to share existence with God, before time was, the Father and His only begotten, together with the Holy Spirit, proceeding from them, dwelt in uncreated glory, all-sufficient, all-perfect, in that Divine happiness from which all created joys come, like scattered drops falling from a fountain. Of the same eternal generation of the Word, attesting His Divinity, the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks in the words : " To which of the angels hath He said at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee : and again, Thou in the beginning, O Lord, didst found the earth, and the works of Thy hands are the heavens. They shall perish, but Thou shalt continue : and they shall all grow old as a garment, and as a vesture Thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed : but Thou art the self-same, and Thy years shall not fail."[2]

Here, then, is the first generation of the Word : in majesty, in eternity, in the brightness of that Holy of Holies, not made with hands nor of this creation, in the unclouded glory of the godhead.

[1] John I. 1, 2, 3. [2] Heb. I. 5, 10, 11, 12.

It is this first great Truth, this first Divine fact, which prepares us to approach the contemplation of the wonders of Bethlehem.

II. There follows upon this a mystery of re-creative Love. God who called into existence, after the creation of the angels, a lesser and weaker race of rational beings, men who mingled the heaven-seeking spirit with the clay of earth, saw that they had wandered far away from Him, and were as a sheep that was lost. As pictured in the parable,[1] He must needs leave the ninety-nine in their blissful security, and go after this lost work of His hands, which without Him must perish. Thus the Love that is eternal, moved by its own overwhelming force, allows no barrier to stand between itself and the object of its desire. Man is in need of a Divine intervention, and Divine Love cannot choose but intervene. An infinite Wisdom could doubtless have devised an infinity of ways by which that lost sheep could be rescued. But an infinite Love triumphantly desires to declare itself, and whereas Wisdom can furnish its many means, Love will insist on one only supreme act, which will adequately reveal its own greatness. Thus it is that the mystery of the Incarnation was decreed,

[1] Luke xv. 4. This is the common Patristic interpretation of the parable.

thus it came to pass that the Word was made flesh.

Creative Love had brought forth the first Adam in all the fullness of grace, and in all the rich abundance of the highest supernatural endowments, amidst the pleasures of an earthly paradise. But that love of the Creator had been spurned, and all its wealth of gifts and high endowments forfeited. The race of Adam had brought upon itself a sentence of condemnation, and the earth too lay under a curse. It became to fallen man a valley of tears, and he wandered as in a desert farther and farther from his true destiny, forgetting his first allegiance, and giving himself up in his blindness to the pursuit of all manner of strange delusions. He lost sight of the one and only Truth, and allowed himself to accept and to worship all that was baneful and false. Phantoms possessed his imagination and his heart, and he came to look upon earth and the things of earth as the only objects of his soul's desire, the only end of all his aspirations. In his far wandering, darkness settled upon his mind, as in the first chaos of the world it rested "upon the face of the deep". The goods and pleasures of earth grew in their influence upon his heart, so as to hold him in undisputed bondage. He came to invest them with a false

divinity and to set up altars to them, and in his degradation bowed down before Mammon and Moloch. The darkness, indeed, that fell upon his mind came as a consequence of the servitude of his will to those grosser desires that mastered it : for the mind tends to colour its thought and shape its reasoning to fit the requirements of the stronger faculty with which it is yoked. As a result of all his perverted activities, he lay helpless under the weight of his own false imaginings, incapable of effecting any deliverance. Sin, and the moral disorder following it, contaminated that better nature which was destined for fellowship with the angels. The whole head was sick, the whole heart faint, as the prophet Isaias said of his people.[1]

Such was the condition of the great mass of men. It is true that a few purer minds and brighter intelligences from time to time arose, both in the East and in the West, whose vision more fully pierced the darkness and caught the light resting on the eternal hills. Yet these masters of human wisdom seemed to have been able to exercise little or no effectual influence upon the generation in which they lived, and the world went on heedless of them in its own wilful, unreasoning way. It advanced farther into the

[1] Is. i. 5.

darkness, it travelled farther away from the primary Truth, it lost and wearied itself to no purpose in the labours of its misdirected search.

Far though man had wandered from God, and wide as was the distance he had placed between his own heart and the supreme Love which claimed it, yet there is no distance which that eternal Love cannot compass, and no obstacle which it cannot overcome. The prophet Habacuc seems to picture the journey—as our minds conceive it—which the Eternal Word consented to make, as He passed from His throne "in light inaccessible," to visit that far-off wanderer in the deserts of earth. "The hills of the world were bowed down by the journeys of His eternity."[1]

It was not to the earth, such as it once was, lit up with the radiance of Divine benediction, that the Divine Visitor must come. It was not to man presenting unsullied in his soul the likeness of his Creator, the image and superscription of his King, that the Lord of creation must descend. It was into the midst of a world reduced to a state of moral and spiritual chaos, amongst men whose corruption had contaminated the earth, that the Eternal Word must enter upon His re-creative mission. Into a poisoned atmosphere,

[1] Hab. III. 6. "Incurvati sunt colles mundi ab itineribus aeternitatis ejus."

peopled by a debased imagination with all manner of false divinities, He must descend and take His place. The Psalmist wrote: "God hath stood in the congregation of gods: and in the midst of them He judgeth gods".[1] Into a controversy of Truth with vilest falsehood, of light with darkness, the Day-spring from on high must vouchsafe to come, that He may deliver them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.[2]

It is true that He chose as the instrument of His coming, and the living medium by which He should enter the world, one who was wholly uncontaminated by the corruption of sin. Yet for all her dowry of grace and original justice, Mary could not alter the world in which she dwelt, and which lay sunk in its spiritual degradation and misery. Such as this fallen world had become, into it the Eternal Word chose to enter.

It was His will to clothe Himself with human nature as He found it, shorn of its first dignity and incorruption. He could not in any degree whatever be tainted by its sin. But the penalties of sin, the heritage of pain and sorrow and death He fully assumed. He chose to descend to the depths of man's humiliation. He could not divest Himself of that essential glory which is the attribute of His Divine nature. But He could veil

[1] Ps. LXXXI. 1. [2] Luke I. 78, 79.

it from the eyes of men, He could hide the immeasurable greatness of His Divine Person in the littleness of a human body, He could overshadow the splendour of His Divine perfections by the humiliations of that created nature which He stooped to take. Accordingly St. Paul wrote of Him: "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man".[1]

1. In every respect the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, His second generation in time, is the counterpart and contrary of His Divine generation in eternity. How overwhelming, even to the minds of angels, is the mystery of the littleness of Bethlehem! Within the narrow compass of a human body, in its first small insignificance, is hidden the Person of Him whose attributes are Immensity and Omnipotence. From the beginning to the end of His earthly career He decreed to save and uplift man by the power of His own example. Pride had wrecked and confused all things. Humility was an unknown virtue, receiving no recognition from the minds of men, preoccupied as they were with their own petty pretensions and ambitions. In His en-

[1] Phil. II. 6, 7.

trance into the world, the Word made flesh leads with Him, as it were by the hand, this new virtue which He has come to introduce and proclaim amongst men. They have not known that mystic force, containing in itself the secret of their deliverance. He will make it known to them, will associate it indissolubly with Himself, will invest it with a dignity they have never supposed it capable of possessing, will even take it to Himself as His own first and most distinctive earthly attribute. If, at least, it be not the first of those attributes in the order of pre-eminence, it becomes the outward sign of that which is the first, for the humility of Christ was the measure of the love of Christ. The incident narrated in St. Matthew's gospel throws its light upon the mystery of Bethlehem. "And Jesus calling unto Him a little child, set him in the midst of them, and said: Amen, I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven."[1]

2. But there is a still further journey of the Eternal Word from "the place where His glory

[1] Matt. xviii. 2, 3, 4.

dwelleth".[1] By a specially ordained chain of secondary causes, and a special combination of human circumstances, when the Lord of creation comes to His own, there is not to be found for Him even the poor shelter that is claimed by the least among the children of men. "He came to His own, and His own received Him not."[2] He from whose free gift flow out all the treasures of earth and heaven, chose for Himself, as His own most acceptable portion in entering into the world, the lot of rudest poverty. He said of Himself: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests: but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head".[3] In accordance with this design of earthly renunciation, He chose to make His solemn entrance into the world amid the nakedness and the stern surroundings of the rock-hewn stable. He who is "clothed with light as with a garment," to whom the earth and the fullness thereof belongs, whose Providence forgets not "the young ravens that call upon Him,"[4] not only lays aside His robe of glory and His sceptre of irresistible power, but assumes the garb and adopts for His own the style and title of poverty, so feared and so despised amongst men. It is part, indeed, of that far-reaching design which

[1] Ps. xxv. 8. [2] John i. 11.
[3] Matt. viii. 20. [4] Ps. cxlvi. 9.

illimitable Love came to accomplish, heeding not the lowly nature of the means by which it was to gain its end. The Incarnate Word came with the specific purpose of setting before men the truth that their Kingdom, as well as His, was not of this world. They had become the slaves of those earth-born riches which they had learned to accumulate. Upon such possession of material treasure they imagined that their whole happiness was destined to depend. They were ready to sacrifice health and pleasure, friendship and liberty and ease, even the great principles of justice and truth, to obtain it. They dreaded poverty as the worst of evils, its very shadow alarmed them. Hence their spiritual bondage under the yoke of an insatiable desire, and their foolish mammon-worship.

By His assumption of poverty, by the strong light of His own example, the Word made flesh led the way to that higher Kingdom where the true treasure is found, where true happiness is attained, where neither rust nor moth consumes, and thieves cannot break through or steal.[1] He brought to the children of men the message of deliverance from the soul-enslaving worship that had possessed and degraded them. He recalled to their hearts the great truth that they were not

[1] Matt. vi. 20.

the creatures of time, but the heirs of eternity. He set before them a Kingdom which He invited them to share with Him, as the joint-heirs of its endless glory. They might well purchase such an inheritance at the cost of a passing sacrifice, or a momentary pain. Poverty with its call to willing sacrifice, wealth with its opportunities of unselfishness and renunciation, were equally the appointments of an all-Wise and all-Loving Providence. Into both one and the other the spirit of sacrifice must enter, that they may lead upwards to God and His Kingdom. But inasmuch as the sacrifice was greater, and the evidence of Divine Love given thereby to men all the more constraining, the Eternal Word in His coming into the world chose poverty for His earthly portion and claimed it for His own. So while He teaches us in His own Person and by the light of His own example the spirit of unworldliness, He at the same time reveals to us the force of that Love which spans the abyss between the glory of heaven and the uttermost extreme of poverty and nakedness on earth.

Thus it is that the contrast was divinely ordained between the second generation of the Word in time, and His first generation in eternity. By that marvellous and infinite dissimilarity the love of God is the more fully de-

clared, the sublime lessons contained in the mystery of the Incarnation more masterfully taught.

It was to point out the twofold generation of the Word, and at the same time to warn men of the contrasts contained therein, that our Lord put the question to the Pharisees in the Temple, "What think you of Christ? whose son is He? They say to Him: David's. He saith to them: How then doth David in spirit call Him Lord: saying, The Lord said to my Lord, sit Thou on My right hand, until I make Thy enemies Thy footstool. If David then call Him Lord, how is He his son?"[1] The message that goes forth from Bethlehem proclaims to us that He who was born in time as David's son was begotten of the Father in eternity as David's Lord. That was the truth which David taught in prophecy to them that were willing to receive it. The example of the Pharisees warns us that there are conditions for the full attainment of that saving truth. If we would receive it, we must be willing to receive the lessons of humility and unworldliness which go with it, which in turn dispose the heart to embrace it and find salvation in it.

Bethlehem, therefore, speaks to us, by its contrast with all that went before it, as the Divine

[1] Matt. xxii. 42-5.

expression of an everlasting Love, as the great act by which the Word of God chose to make that Love known to us. It speaks of those virtues which the word Incarnate came especially to teach. It is His first sermon to men, His first appeal to them whom He calls to be His brethren. Let us to-day hear His voice. Let our hearts be opened to His inspirations, let our minds be opened to His Divine teaching, and He will communicate to us His spirit and His Divine light, His humility and unworldliness, His grace to lead us after Him in His own sure footsteps, His help to follow Him, until He discovers to us at the end of our life's journey the true kingdom and the inalienable home which He has announced to us.

III.

A MEDITATION FOR THE LAST DAY OF THE YEAR.

"Et dixit qui sedebat in throno: ecce nova facio omnia."

"And He that sat on the throne said: Behold, I make all things new."—Apoc. xxi. 5.

The passing of a year into the great void of things that are not calls us to consider what it is that has gone from us, not to return. In a sense, we may say that it is part of ourselves which we have lost. The measure of time that mostly concerns us is that interval, taken out of it, which gives us the span of our own life. It is too true that that small interval which represents our life-history on earth seems insignificant by comparison with all that has gone on before and all that will come after. The world has gone on many thousands of years without us; it will continue its course, moving through its cycles of years and centuries, long after we have gone. Compared with the age of the world, its venerable

mountains and mighty seas, we are as flitting shadows crossing its surface for a little while and disappearing. "What is your life?" St. James asks in his Epistle. "It is a vapour which appeareth for a little while, and afterwards shall vanish away."[1]

I. But that which we now call life is only a part of a wonderful whole. It is as a point of light in a boundless sky. Yet, behind that minute point a world of vast importance to each one lies hidden. Upon it great issues depend. It determines a mighty future. Great responsibilities rest upon it. It has a purpose fixed for it, an orbit in which it is appointed to move, a function allotted to it in the great design of the universe, to contribute, as part of a great mechanism, its individual action, so as that the desired result may be attained.

All creation serves the purpose of God. All things obey the first law imposed upon them, which law is only the expression of the Divine Will. The planets move in their orbits round the sun, the stars keep their fixed courses, the earth fulfils its own natural functions—seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, night and day follow one another in unvarying sequence, and all offer the worship of obedience to God, and to His

[1] St. James iv. 15.

will which has imposed their laws upon them. Indeed it may be said that inanimate nature sets before us a wonderful example of unswerving obedience to the holy will of God. In that sense the Psalmist sang, "Day to day uttereth speech, and night to night sheweth knowledge".[1]

The whole vault of heaven proclaims His glory, and its own obedience to Him. Certainly man and his little career upon earth are but small things as compared with the masses of matter above and around him. His life is as a speck, compared with the long centuries that represent their age and duration. Nevertheless, he is a higher and a nobler work of God. Upon him is stamped a reflection of the glory of God which none of those vast material works of creation can claim. His soul carries within it the image and likeness of his Creator, and therefore his life, however short and fleeting it may be upon earth, is of far more importance than the existence of the greatest of those material objects which give to the earth its special features, or the mightiest monuments of the world's antiquity. For that reason it is that short as is the life of man upon earth, passing vapour though it may be, flourishing for a day like the prophet's gourd and the next day consumed, yet it is immeasurably more

[1] Ps. xviii. 2.

precious than all the centuries that make up the material history of the universe.

Thus the divisions and sub-divisions of years and months and days that go to form this life of ours are full of an importance we cannot too greatly appreciate. They have a living value, which makes them of far more dignity and consequence, quickly though they may pass, than all the grey records of centuries left upon the face of nature. For these passing years, one of which approaches to take the place of that which is all but gone, form the first stage of an existence which will be continued elsewhere, which will become wholly independent of time, because it is destined to share with God His eternity. The ancient hills, to which nature in some past upheaval gave birth, will in some similar cataclasm of the future be effaced. "They shall all grow old as a garment, and as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed."[1] Heaven and earth shall pass away, yet the life of man in its high destiny continues, its scope and power indefinitely enlarged, for the simple reason that he is the son, and by a high privilege of grace, the heir of God. "If a son, an heir also through God."[2] Thus it is that our years and months and days derive their great importance and

[1] Heb. i. 11; Ps. cx. 26. [2] Gal. iv. 7.

their immeasurable value. They are the beginnings of our future eternity, they are the determining causes of the character of that eternity, they are as a precious seed-time upon which the whole of the great harvest of that eternity depends. Hence they have for us an inestimable living value. Could the rich man of the parable, who asked that Lazarus might be sent to his five brethren to warn them, have been allowed to come back and live over again his life on earth, how different a view he would have taken of the value of the time that was given him, and all the wonderful possibilities it contained. Thus it is that we cannot look back upon a year that is gone from us without misgiving, without some sense of lost opportunities, without some self-accusation and self-reproach. How many of its days have passed wholly empty of any record of advantage to ourselves, or of effort for God! How many bear a record odious to God and hurtful to our own souls! We cannot, indeed, undo the past; we cannot return upon it to correct its mistakes and right the wrong we may have done. But at all times there is left open to us, in the mercy of God, a means of seeking deliverance from the worst consequences of error and sin. We can offer for our misspent time, for our wasted opportunities, for our faults of thought

and word and deed the sacrifice of an afflicted spirit, the oblation of a humble and contrite heart which our Father in heaven will never despise. Thus we may as children, seeking pardon for the past and desirous to do better in the future, lay before the mercy-seat of God the tale of our failures, humbly entreating His grace and compassion, and seeking succour from Him for the time to come. That is what our sense of loss and failure must move us to do.

But there is a further witness which is borne by the past, and a further duty which it imposes upon us. We have been the recipients of constantly repeated mercies and favours and gifts at the hands of God. He has borne with us, awaiting, with a Father's patience, some more fitting return for His unwearying love. Graces have been multiplied and tokens of Divine solicitude have been expended upon us, to the end that love might awaken love, and goodness lead to goodness. Of how many such marks of the love of God, of how many such graces have we been in any degree conscious? For how many have we offered any return of gratitude? There remains, accordingly, at the close of a year the duty of rendering thanksgiving to God for His gifts, few of which are known, by far the greater part always remaining unknown to us. Such is

the bounty of God, ever active in behalf of those who are mostly unconscious of what they owe to Him. Let us not fail in the duty of thanksgiving. It is a filial act, well worthy of the true children of God. Let us offer a sincere desire to supply, by a full-hearted exercise of thanksgiving, for all our deficiencies of praise and gratitude in the past, for all our insensibility to the favours we have received.

II. "He that sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new." It is part of the ever-active goodness of God to continually call forth life out of death, light out of darkness, beauty and order out of hopeless confusion. He ceases not His creative work. "My father worketh until now, and I work."[1] In nature He is ever renewing the freshness of life when decay has laid hold of the withered remnants of the past. A new dawn breaks forth from out of the death-like night, after it has sealed up and buried all things visible. By virtue of His ordinance and power, nature is ever renewing its youth.

But more than all in the souls of men does the Lord of creation exercise His beneficent office of renovation and re-creation. He can call forth the spirit that is bound, as Lazarus was, in all the trammels and bands of the tomb, and bid it

[1] John v. 17.

return to life and the service of Him who made it. He can bid men come forth out of the sepulchres of the past, however strong may be the force of habits which have held them in bondage, and awaken to a new life, a new sense of the love of God, of the claims of Faith, of the unlimited power of Divine grace. It belongs to Him not only to arouse to a consciousness of life, not only to give the inspiration of Faith, but also to impart the strengthening grace whereby Faith bends itself forward to the fulfilment of duty and the conquest of the difficulties that beset it. He can dissipate the clouds of discouragement brought up from the remembrance of the past, and can make Hope reawaken vigour, and give new spirit and life to the efforts we are impelled to make.

It is true that the experience of the past must humble and chasten us. In that sense the Psalmist said, "Bonum mihi quia humiliasti me," "it is good for me that Thou hast humbled me".[1] There is less danger of mistaking presumption for courage, or confidence in self for confidence in God. But the wisdom that has been purchased at the expense of a sad experience serves not only to humble and control, but also to stimulate to more efficacious efforts of love in the future.

[1] Ps. CXVIII. 71.

Doubtless when the triple question was put to Peter, "Lovest thou Me more than these?" the recollection of the past not only excluded all boastfulness, but added intensity to the devotion with which the answer was given, "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee".[1] To us, as to Peter, the humble acknowledgment of unfaithfulness in the past must serve as a call to higher love and truer fidelity in the future.

It is the office of grace to make all things new. It is the part of nature to respond to the inspiration and the ready concurrence of grace, to offer itself with new earnestness of purpose and new sincerity of heart and will to the work it is sent to do. As we stand ready to commence a new measure of the time allotted to us, the words of the Apostle make special appeal to us: "Put ye on the new man, who according to God, is created in justice and holiness of truth".[2] It remains for us to offer a willing co-operation to the renovating efficiency of God's grace. It remains for us to make that always acceptable gift to God, the real will to love and serve Him. According to the depth of our sincerity will be the richness and power of His grace. The one thing certain is that His grace will never fail,

[1] John xxi. 15. [2] Eph. iv. 24.

that it is without limit both in abundance and efficacy, if we will but take it and use it.

Let us, therefore, put on that new spiritual manhood with which the grace of God is ready to clothe us. Let us turn from the self-caused failures of the past and enter with strong resolution upon the future. Let us go forward in the strength of the hope that confoundeth not, for He will be with us who can "make all things new".

We know not what the future has in store for us, or whether much or little time remains. We are warned by our Lord that however many may be the years of our pilgrimage, life is at best only that "little while" which He describes it to be. "A little while, and you shall not see Me, and again a little while, and you shall see Me."[1] May He grant us to realize its littleness, to see it in its true proportion to the whole, to spend it faithfully in His service, to be ready for Him when He will call us away. "If I shall go and prepare a place for you: I will come again, and will take you to Myself, that where I am, you also may be."[2]

[1] John xvi. 19. [2] John xiv. 3.

IV.

THE HOLY NAME OF JESUS, LIGHT IN DARKNESS.

Second Sunday after Epiphany.

"Et vocabis nomen ejus Jesum; ipse enim salvum faciet populum suum a peccatis eorum."

"And thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins."—Matt. I. 21.

St. Paul speaks of a great trial that came to him, which he calls a sting or thorn in his flesh, from which he sought and ardently asked deliverance. Some of the Fathers understand him to mean a severe physical pain or infirmity; others again the persecution of hostile carnal-minded men; others again take the Apostle to mean an agony of temptation which he suffered in the secrecy of his soul within. Whether the pain and the distress were physical, or mental, or spiritual, the Apostle prayed repeatedly to be delivered from it. "Thrice I besought the Lord that it might depart from me."[1] But the trouble

[1] 2 Cor. XII. 8.

was not removed, and the answer was made, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for power is made perfect in infirmity".[1] The Apostle's prayer was really heard. It was efficacious, however, not in obtaining the immediate removal of that which had such power to hurt, nor in securing the suspension of some law of nature, but rather in winning a secret gift of grace, whereby Divine Power came to supplement human infirmity.

I. St. Paul's experience is that of all men. Life, as it is ordained to be carried on here below, is a period of trial which is accompanied with pain and sorrow in forms innumerable. Sometimes the visitation is made to the individual, and the iron enters his soul, without the perception or knowledge of his fellow-men, and he passes through his ordeal under the eye only of Him who sees and knows all. Sometimes distress and sorrow fall upon whole communities of men, and nature's laws which serve man's interests, and nature itself which exists for his benefit and ministers to his wants, turn against him all their elemental violence. A hurricane sweeps the surface of the sea, and ruthlessly carries off all life before it, and men that have gone down in their ships "to do business in great waters" perish and

[1] 2 Cor. v. 9.

are seen no more. Or, again, a pestilence travels over a whole continent, and turns its cities into deserts, and men fall as leaves before an autumn wind. Or, as we have had so lately brought before us,[1] the earth itself turns to destruction, and with open mouth devours its own children. Thousands perish, many thousands are left desolate and mourning. Such is the multiplied mass of human sorrow and suffering, such the effect of one stroke of nature's pitiless power.

Of old it turned the mind of the faithful servant of God, Job, to heart-rending questions and bewildering problems. So to-day he who is the victim of a great trial, or whose heart is crushed under the weight of a great sorrow, has the same questions haunting him and the same stern facts confronting him. Is not the earth God's earth, and the laws of nature, are they not God's laws? Is human life made to be the sport of cruel circumstance, or simple chance, and not rather the beneficent gift of a beneficent Father? How, then, asks the sufferer, can these things be? And if multitudes perish, and good and bad are joined indiscriminately in one common destruction, surely that appears to be very different from the teaching of the parable which says, "Suffer

[1] The allusion in the text is to the earthquake at Messina, December, 1908.

both to grow until the harvest".[1] Thus clouds gather over the mind, and darkness : there is desolation within as well as without.

Nevertheless, if St. Paul's experience of pain be typical of that of men in general, the answer given to his prayer is that which must satisfy all our questionings and all our perplexity. "My grace is sufficient for thee : for power is made perfect in infirmity." On the one hand, we are reminded that a place and time of probation cannot be changed into a sphere of final rest and reward. Earth is not heaven, the world around us is not a paradise, life such as we now have it is temporary and passing. "We have not here an abiding city, but we seek one that is to come."[2] We are "pilgrims and strangers," as the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us, making our journey homewards, and must expect, while passing through a land that cannot hold us, to suffer some cold and hunger, some privation and occasional distress. These things are, as it were, the sign-posts pointing to our real destination. Or, as Job expresses it, "the life of man upon earth is a warfare,"[3] and St. Paul puts the same thought before his disciple in the words, "Labour as a good soldier of Christ

[1] Matt. xiii. 30. [2] Heb. xiii. 14.
[3] Job vii. 1.

Jesus".[1] No one must expect to escape all hardship in the strenuous time of war. He must be prepared rather to receive an occasional scar which will not leave him without suffering. The day will come when the strife is done and the spoils of victory are distributed, so that each may have his full share. All labour is little, all sacrifices are light as compared with that which they win. "That which is momentary, and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure, exceedingly, an eternal weight of glory that shall be revealed in us."[2] In the bitterness of the day of trial, when our human infirmity needs something to sustain it, there is the Divine assurance, "My grace is sufficient for thee". The trial, in point of fact, is never permitted to exceed the strength which grace brings with it. "Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able; but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it."[3]

Moreover, as both night and day, the darkness and the light, are made to subserve the great designs of God, so is it with those clouded periods of trial that are sent us. Out of those occasions of pain there are drawn some of the best and highest elements in our nature, which otherwise

[1] 2 Tim. II. 3. [2] 2 Cor. IV. 17. [3] 1 Cor. X. 13.

had been dormant or dead. Patience and trust and heroic endurance, self-sacrifice, faith like that of Abraham, charity and zeal longing to spend and be spent for others, these are the qualities developed in that stern school of probation, which make us worthier children of God. These are the virtues which bring into stronger relief the impress of the Divine attributes originally left upon us.

II. But in the new dispensation of Christian faith we are not left face to face with the mystery of suffering, with only general principles to guide us. There is a name given us which is in itself a centre of light, dissipating our darkness. The holy name of Jesus is not only a name of saving hope, but is also one of Divine illumination. It stands for the mystery of the Incarnation, for the life-history on earth of the Word made flesh, for that life which "was the light of men".[1] Human life such as was shared by a Divine Person, human conditions such as were chosen by Him for His passage through this place of our pilgrimage, cannot be without all-wise purpose, cannot but reveal to us facts and truths that enable us to see the mystery of pain in its true place and proportion, and its harmony with the Justice and Mercy and Love of God.

[1] John i. 4.

What, then, does the holy name of Jesus tell us but the complete summary of a Divine life of suffering on earth? It was first assumed in the midst of pain, when the knife of circumcision inflicted its wound and the first drops of the Precious Blood were shed. It was the object of all the cruellest opposition and most perverse hatred that could bring the bitterest sense of disappointment to the soul. "Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth."[1] St. John tells us in his narrative of the scene of Gethsemane. The sacrilegious violence which His very name aroused, and all the criminal outrages which were about to be offered to Him in His passion brought upon Him that mental agony of which He said, "My soul is sorrowful even unto death".[2] When sin had its triumph and the cross was laden with its Divine Victim, then the name of Jesus shone out from the title affixed to the cross. Surely it is a name telling of a more than human sorrow. "O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow."[3]

If it be thought that this one great act of sacrifice stands apart, and has no exemplary relation to the lives of men on earth but only to

[1] John xviii. 4, 5. [2] Matt. xxvi. 38.
[3] Lam. i. 12.

the one Divine work of redemption, then we have to remember all that went before the cross, all the links in the chain of that life which ended upon it. Of a truth it may be said that Calvary was only the last of a great series of mysteries in the life of our Lord, in which He shared all the pain and suffering that the life of man on earth can have associated with it. It was a choice deliberately made, as the Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us, "Who having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame".[1] The cross cast its shadow before it, and His whole life upon earth was overclouded by the great mystery of suffering. In His passion He chose not only to descend to those lower depths of pain where human life is so heavy a weariness, but even to depths of suffering to which mere man can never penetrate. "Surely he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows; and we have thought him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted."[2] The choice which He made did not merely apply to the manner of His death, or the means of redemption. It embraced every moment of His earthly years, it brought the fullest weight of the burden of sorrow to every portion of His life from Bethlehem onwards.

[1] Heb. XII. 2. [2] Is. LIII. 4.

It was not His intention to teach men by abstract principles, or lofty lessons of spiritual perfection given in words only. He came "to do and to teach".[1] Therefore He so descended to this sphere of our labours and pains, of our disappointments and sorrows, as to bear the heaviest burden of all, the sorrow beyond all other sorrow, that the prophet might describe Him "as it were a leper, and as one struck by God"; or again, "a worm and no man".[2] He is the leader in this journey of human life, the high priest who can have compassion on our infirmities, because He shared those infirmities, "tempted in all things like as we are, without sin".[3] He is the Master, and asks His disciple not to be dissatisfied, if for the present he finds himself no better than the Master. He is the way and the truth and the life; and at every step we are reminded that He has gone before us laden with a cross, only a small portion of the weight of which He asks us to bear with Him. If He took upon Himself poverty that He might turn it into everlasting riches; if He took humility that He might exalt it to the highest place; so He took upon Himself pain and sorrow that He might sanctify human suffering, that He might invest it with a sacred dignity, that He might

[1] Acts i. 1. [2] Ps. xxi. 7. [3] Heb. iv. 15.

associate it in sacrificial union with His own triumphant cross.

Every victim of pain, every heart that is bruised, every sufferer amongst the multitudes of men has his bond of union with the chief of all sufferers, the spotless and saving Victim of Calvary. The shadow of the cross and the protection of the name affixed to it rest upon them, as they pass through the fiery ordeal of pain allotted them. They are as members suffering by reason of the fullness of their union with the head.

"But if you partake of the suffering of Christ rejoice,"[1] St. Peter exhorted the first Christians. The holy Name which gives a Divine title to the cross gives a Divine light upon this life of ours, so troubled with the mystery of pain. It is written of that mystical journey of the Israelites in the wilderness that they came to the waters of Mara, which they could not drink because of their bitterness. Then Moses "cried to his Lord, and He showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, they were turned into sweetness".[2] The light of Faith shows us the cross as that mystic tree, which turns to sweetness and hope and future joy all the bitter waters of this our present life and pilgrimage. If the natural tendency of

[1] Peter iv. 13. [2] Ex. xv. 25.

sorrow is to embitter, the virtue of that mystic tree, the grace of association with its Divine Victim, comes to sweeten the fountains of our life, and to make it possible for us to endure or accomplish all things by reason of Him who strengtheneth us.

III. But there is a still further lesson given us in the relation of the holy Name to the pains and trials of our earthly life. It is not merely in His own Person and in His own Name that our Lord takes upon Himself the burden of suffering, and the part of an innocent Victim. The lives that were called into closest association with His, that were spent wholly in the love and service of His Name, were not only those which shared the more largely in His grace and sanctity, but were also those which partook the more fully of the bitterness of His earthly sorrow. Who was more pleasing in His sight, or had "found grace with God"[1] more fully than she who was joined to Him in the mystery of His birth in Bethlehem, and in the long years of hourly intercourse with Him at Nazareth? Yet she was associated with Him from the beginning in Simeon's prophecy, and shared as none other could share in all the desolation of the cross. "Thine own soul a sword shall pierce"[2] was the Divine decree pro-

[1] Luke I. 30. [2] Luke II. 35.

nounced concerning her, all spotless and fair and full of the gifts of Divine Love as was her soul. The proximity of Mary to Jesus did not mean for her any immunity from the trouble of earth, but rather a fuller share than was given to others of the supreme sorrow that found its consummation on Calvary. It was beneath the shadow of the cross that her union with God reached its highest perfection, it was there that her primary share in the future glory of the cross was merited and won. She typified life in its most privileged conditions, passed under the most special care of the Providence of God, daily treading upon the holiest ground, most closely united in sinless love to God, and yet called to bear the heaviest weight of earth's sorrow and distress.

That is surely intended to demonstrate to us the fact that, however connected by reason of Adam's fall are sin and sorrow, yet the pains and distresses of life, as they come to us individually, are no mere penalties of personal sin, no absolute and unmixed evils, no marks of Divine hatred or indifference, no proofs of Divine displeasure, but oftentimes the reverse of all this, true signs of predestination to glory. The part allotted to Mary in Simeon's prophecy, and fulfilled beneath the cross, tells us of a high vocation, a loving purpose, a lofty privilege of association with

Christ in sacrifice, which is in itself an assurance of future association with Him in the glory of His Kingdom.

When the sons of Zebedee coveted the highest places in that Kingdom, our Lord put them to the test by the question, "Can ye drink of the chalice that I drink of; or be baptized with the baptism wherewith I am baptized?"[1] If their aspirations were high, they must be prepared to satisfy high and severe conditions. The cup whose bitterness was such that He Himself besought the Father to remove it from Him, they must be willing to drink, His baptism of blood they must be ready to share. When they professed their willingness so to partake of His cup, He announced to them that in very deed they should drink it, in due time they should be joined to Him as victims in sacrifice. But it was by reason of their sacrifice that they were called to sit upon thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

When, again, St. Paul is described in the vision given to Ananias as "a vessel of election," it is also said, "For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake".[2] The conversion and high vocation of the Apostle is at one and the same time a call to "suffer for My name's

[1] Mark x. 38. [2] Acts ix. 16.

sake". Some of those sufferings the Apostle himself gives in brief outline in his second Epistle to the Corinthians. "Of the Jews five times did I receive forty stripes save one, thrice was I beaten with rods, once I was stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck."[1] He wrote of himself, "For to me to live is Christ: and to die is gain".[2] His sublime graces only drew him nearer to the mystery of the cross, and the sacrifice of his death, no less than the sufferings of his life, testified to that Divine Love which decrees to send pain and trial to its chosen ones, to the end that if they sow in tears they may all the more abundantly reap in joy.[3]

But not alone to the first faithful followers of Christ did the holy Name of Jesus bring its message of light and its call to sacrifice. In every age and to the most remote of His disciples it carries a similar light and inspiration. To every one that comes to Him He gives a bond of union, a share in His Divine sonship, "the Spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry, Abba, Father".[4] But then that nobler birth to supernatural grace carries with it a nobler call to the duties and burdens of a higher sonship. Therefore, from the simple motive of filial duty the

[1] 2 Cor. xi. 24 *sq.*
[2] Phil. i. 21.
[3] Ps. cxv. 5.
[4] Rom. viii. 15.

Epistle to the Hebrews offers its invitation to suffer cheerfully, in a manner worthy of them to whom it is given to be the sons of God. "Whom the Lord loveth, He chastiseth : and He scourgeth every son that He receiveth. Persevere under discipline. God dealeth with you as with His sons : for what son is there whom the father doth not correct ?" [1] The son, assured of his father's love, though ignorant of his purpose, submits with filial loyalty to the hardships which his father's better judgment may impose. We are the sons of God, and not only sons but heirs also, "joint heirs with Christ".[2] We are, individually as well as collectively, the objects of an infinite Love, watched and guided on our way by an infinite Wisdom.

Such a Love must be allowed to choose its own tests for the trial of our faithfulness. But it waits with Divine longing to repay its hundredfold for every minute act of loyalty that is shown to it. If it causes pain, it is only to the end that thereby may be opened to us a new fount of joy. If it sends sorrow, it is in order that such sorrow may carry with it its recognized title to everlasting consolation. There is a special beatitude devoted to them that mourn ; whose lives on earth are overshadowed by the mystery of pain.

[1] Heb. xii. 6, 7. [2] Rom. viii. 17.

They are the heirs of a Divine promise. They are the associates of their Lord in the lot and portion chosen by Him upon earth. They shall be partners with Him in the Kingdom which He willed so to enter.[1] "They shall no more hunger nor thirst, neither shall the sun fall on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall rule them, and shall lead them to the fountains of the waters of life, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."[2]

[1] Luke xxiv. 26. [2] Apoc. vii. 16, 17.

V.

THE HOLY FAMILY.

"Et descendit cum eis et venit Nazareth, et erat subditus illis."

"And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth: and was subject to them."—Luke II. 51.

Our Lord's object in taking human nature was to bless and sanctify our human life, not only in its higher aspects and more exalted activities, but also in its most ordinary conditions and in its humblest relations.

I. He is not led by the Spirit into the desert until He has passed through the thirty years of His life at Nazareth, beneath the roof of Mary and Joseph. He does not seclude Himself in His earliest youth, like St. John the Baptist, from the mass of men and the ordinary conditions of human life. In the general order of God's Providence, the life of man upon earth is not to be lived apart and isolated. There have been saints of the desert, called aside by the Spirit of God, just as the holy Baptist was. But they are the

exception, not the rule. The common lot of man is to live in social intercourse, influencing and being influenced, sharing with others in common burdens and in common joys, passing through similar experiences, dealing with similar difficulties, occupied with the same humble cares and duties from day to day, until "the night cometh when no man can work".

Our Lord came to share this common life of men upon earth; to bless, to sanctify, to exalt it in all its phases, in all its departments. Hence the greater number of years which He spent upon earth were passed at Nazareth. It was decreed in the merciful counsels of God that not in the precincts of the Temple, nor in the ministry of the Gospel, nor on Tabor, nor in the more sublime works of His Divine mission, but in the humble life of Mary and Joseph's home the greatest part of His days should be spent, sharing our common lot and portion, man's common call to go forth "to his work and to his labour until the evening".[1]

It is a striking fact, and one which compels our reverent study and attention, that so much the greater proportion of our Lord's earthly life was spent in the simplicity and obscurity of Nazareth. He had come upon the mightiest of all missions—

[1] Ps. CIII. 23.

to regenerate the world and restore it to God, from Whom it had been parted. "His Father's business" so pressed upon Him that at the age of twelve He separated Himself perforce from His parents, and for the brief space of three days He sat in the midst of the doctors, proposing to them the great questions upon which the salvation of the world depends. Yet with this slight break in the long silence of thirty years, with this single emergence from the cloud of obscurity which hid Him from the eyes of men, He continues at Nazareth to spend in subjection to Mary and Joseph the precious days in which His supreme work is to be accomplished and the Divine purpose of the Incarnation fulfilled. "Surely He hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows,"[1] the prophet says of His life amongst us, and in the Epistle to the Hebrews He is called "not a High Priest who cannot have compassion on our infirmities; but one tempted in all things like as we are, without sin".[2]

He desires to enter into every department of human life, its humblest tasks as well as its most sublime endeavours, that He may bless and sanctify it in all its phases. Since the general portion, the more ordinary type of life shared by the mass of men, is one of obscure effort, lost to

[1] Is. LIII. 4. [2] Heb. IV. 15.

sight in the petty details of daily duty, as a stream is buried in the sand, He chooses that common type and makes it His own. He will live the life of the great multitude of men. He will bless it in His Divine person, He will give it a royal dignity, He will touch it with a glory just as great and as resplendent as that which accompanies the highest and most honoured deeds which men may do. After His example and His own experience of our human life, no one can say that there is any department of it, any avocation which by stress of necessity men must follow, so lowly in itself, so shorn of all dignity or worth, as not to open out possibilities of the greatest spiritual fruit or the highest spiritual perfection. It was precisely such simple means that He who was Wisdom incarnate chose whereby to attain the highest of all ends.

He not only blesses human life upon its lowest plane, but He teaches the value of that life which the poorest and most obscure amongst the children of men may lead. Lowly and mean as it may seem to a mere worldly eye, it has its vast potencies, its wondrous opportunities of giving supreme honour to God, of opening heaven to man. Our Lord's life at Nazareth is, therefore, the answer to any question that can be raised as to the value of life, or the meaning of its tasks

and burdens and pains. It is not the mere material deeds we do, or the high things we achieve, that make our life great or glorious before God. It is the manner in which all acts are performed. The desire to do God's will on earth as it is done in heaven, the love which seeks God and not self in everything, the inner sacrifice of the heart inspiring all that is outwardly done, even though it be the smallest of human acts or gifts—like the widow's offering at the Temple—it is this which gives value, dignity, merit, and heaven itself to the work of our hands and the effort of our lives. The Divine pattern and type of perfection, set before the minds of men in the life of the Incarnate Word at Nazareth, is a revelation concerning the value and importance and high possibilities of every phase of human life on earth, and a lesson of peace and contentment to the restless hearts of men.

II. But there is another purpose in our Lord's uneventful years at Nazareth, and another practical lesson which He desires to give us. It is one of the warnings given by St. Paul in his second Epistle to Timothy, concerning "the last days," that "men shall be lovers of themselves, covetous, haughty, proud, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, without affection".[1] Men shall indeed

[1] 2 Tim. III. 23.

degenerate from every worthy ideal, when they come to be without affection and without gratitude. But there is something more than a merely human ideal, or a purely human sanction, given us with regard to those primary and fundamental bonds which join men together in the unity of the family and the home.

In the accomplishment of the Incarnation, our Lord deigned so to take our human nature as not to come parentless into the world, not to spring suddenly into full human life, having, like the first Adam, no parent other than God Himself. He accepts with our flesh and blood nature's first tie, that of a son to a mother; and in accepting the pure love of a mother's heart, responds to it with a heart full of nature's highest inspiration, and full, too, of that love more than human that comes from a nature and personality that are Divine. Then when another human being is called into the secrets of God, and Joseph is chosen to cast over the home and childhood of Christ the shadow of his protection, he also becomes the giver and receiver of a sacred affection, and for all the devotion that he offers obtains in return not a mere cold deference to his paternal office, but the warmth and fervour and bliss-giving tokens of a love that is both human and Divine. Thus our Lord takes upon

Him the "cords of Adam" of which the prophet speaks,[1] the ties of the heart, blessing in His own person those first bonds of human affection which draw together the children of men. In His Sacred Heart, and in the daily exercise of His hidden life, He sanctifies those human affections which nature prompts, He puts the seal and sanction of His Divine example upon them.

The home of Nazareth was a paradise of mutual love, mutual solicitude, mutual devotion. All the offices that love, forgetful of self and preoccupied for the sake of others, could render, all these were continually being interchanged and rendered mutually day by day each to other by the members of that holy family. It was the home of peace, the sanctuary of domestic love, the shrine of mutual devotion. No note of discord, however faint, ever broke its beautiful harmony. It reflected on earth the unity and peace that reign eternally in heaven. The Psalmist sings the praise of God "who maketh men of one manner to dwell in a house".[2] But the holy home of Nazareth is in the designs of God set for a sign and pattern of every Christian home, and the model of every Christian family. "Look and make it according to the pattern that was shown thee in the mount,"[3] God said

[1] Osee xi. 4. [2] Ps. lxvii. 7. [3] Exod. xxv. 40.

to Moses in reference to that first tabernacle which He ordered to be made for His service. Similarly there is a pattern given in the holy household of Nazareth towards which every Christian household must look, that they may study to reproduce its harmony, its charity, its sacred domestic affection, its constant interchange of kindly offices, its "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace".

If men become the slaves of a self-centred egotism, if they are without gratitude and without affection, if they are heartless to parents and colder than strangers to their own flesh and blood, then is this only because they have turned away from the teaching and example of Christ Himself, and have forgotten the lesson of Nazareth and the Divine pattern that is set them. Meantime the great fact of our Lord taking up in His Divine person the simple ties and affections of our common domestic life, blessing and sanctifying them, imparting to them the sanction of His Divine example, directing their activities so as that they serve to give supreme honour to God, is a lesson too precious for us to pass over, and too full of encouragement for us to forget in the course of those daily cares and burdens which go to make up the lot of ordinary life. In His own life He has consecrated nature's first bond uniting

together the hearts of men, He has shown how it tends upward to God, how human love duly regulated by a Divine standard leads to the perfection of our nature, forms indeed a present preparation for the life of love which awaits us in the bosom of God.

Indirectly, of course, this bond of love which was assumed in all unspeakable tenderness by the Divine Word in relation to Mary, and in a lesser degree to Joseph, points to the high privilege and the royal honour bestowed upon them. It teaches us to honour, and in company with Him to love them, if for no other reason than this, that He honoured and loved them Who is to us our all-sufficient warranty, our Way and Truth and Life. If the house of Nazareth has lengthened its cords and strengthened its stakes, if it has grown into the Church of God which encircles the world, then Mary and Joseph must be to-day to its many members what they were to its Divine Founder in the days when He dwelt amongst us and His "life was the light of men".[1]

III. There is a third lesson given to us by our Lord at Nazareth, and it is precisely that which is brought into strongest relief in the words of St. Luke, "He was subject to them".

[1] John i. 4.

The world by disobedience, begotten of pride, broke away from God. One primary purpose of the Incarnation was to show men what must be their way back to God, from whom they had strayed. They must retrace their steps, turn from the worship of their own will to the worship of God's will, and recognize the fact that whereas the deification of self-will can only end in a degrading servitude, the full acknowledgment of the supremacy of God's will ends in the highest liberty and peace. Therefore our Lord came to give a great practical lesson in the virtue of obedience. "For as by the disobedience of one man many were made sinners; so also by the obedience of one, many shall be made just."[1] In the very act of redemption He is described as becoming "obedient unto death".[2] Lest, moreover, it might seem sufficient to render this submission only to the direct authority of God Himself, He is not content with obeying the will of His heavenly Father, but, all Divine as He is, He stoops for our instruction to obey mere men. Thus His life for thirty years is summed up in the words, "He was subject to them".

It would be rash indeed to set comparatively slight value on the virtue of obedience, as a means of honouring God, when it stands out in

[1] Rom. v. 19. [2] Phil. ii. 8.

such strong relief amongst those virtues which our Lord chose especially to exercise in His life amongst us. If the world does not honour it, though it jealously demands it, it is enough that God honours and crowns it. It is enough that by ignoring it, with the first Adam, we part from God : by seeking to practise it, with the second Adam, we find our way back to God. Doubtless our Lord had it in view when He uttered the warning words, " Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven ".[1] It is a test of that simplicity and humility which He came to teach, as a necessary part of Christian character and Christian life.

The world may tend, in accordance with the more complex and artificial type of character which it has developed, to find in obedience only a form of expediency, or of self-interest, or again it may see in it a mere mechanical submission to some irresistible necessity, resting on no higher principle than that by which the tree bends before the storm. It may resent interference with its free will, and chafe against any yoke that is externally imposed upon it. Yet the whole idea of Christian obedience is that it is a yoke of love, not of servitude, nor of constraint.

[1] Matt. xviii. 3.

It is the filial response to a Father's love in the cheerful acceptance of a Father's will. It is a turning of the heart to God in filial worship of His all-loving paternal authority, the taking up of His yoke which love makes sweet, as it makes His burden light. It is the gift of something which is peculiarly man's own, indeed the only thing which is fully and absolutely his own, his one inviolable possession—his free will—which he lays on the altar and offers in loving homage to the service of his Lord. This it is which, as the prophet said,[1] is better than many victims, and forms the essence of all such practical religion as is acceptable in the sight of God.

Moreover, faith, enlightened in the school of Nazareth, sees in the persons of men exercising any legitimate authority not so much their human limitations, but rather the shadow of a Divine authority which, as a mantle, covers them. In the parental office, it sees and honours the all-ruling Providence of Him from Whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named.[2] In the authority that holds human society together it honours the Divine law of order, and the Will which finds expression in the just laws of a civilized state. In the spiritual authority of the Church, it sees the Master behind the Apostle, it heeds not the short-

[1] 1 Kings xv. 22. [2] Eph. iii. 15.

comings of the human representative, nor does it distract itself with the reasons that may be suggested for or against a particular command, but it takes the ever-living Divine fact of the Church's rightful authority, and realizes in its obedience the words, "He that heareth you, heareth Me".[1]

Thus has our Lord exalted the virtue of obedience to a primary place, and supplied it with a motive worthy of its importance. The lesson that He gives at Nazareth is appropriate to all times, but is especially applicable to our own, when the world would strip obedience of its dignity and importance, or would give it a purely utilitarian object and motive. He has impressed it with the royal seal of His choice, and with the high sanction of His example. He sets it before us in its true value, in its place of honour amongst those virtues which form the Christian life, and in their full development constitute Christian perfection.

May He who was the sun and centre of that holy household of Nazareth draw us into the sacred circle of its illumination and its grace. May He enable us to learn the lessons He so long and patiently deigned there to teach. May He fill us with its spirit of peace and charity, of zeal for the perfection of our ways in the obscure duties

[1] Luke x. 16.

of life, of spiritual aim and intention in the performance of the common acts of daily life, seeking to turn little things into great by the supernatural motive which transfigures them. May He teach us His own loyal obedience to every expression of our heavenly Father's will, whether made directly from Himself or indirectly through His appointed representatives, bearing in mind the Church's words, "cui servire regnare est"—"to serve Whom is to reign". May He at length take us into membership with that holy household, as it now is in its final perfection, gathered around His throne and sharing with Him the glory of His everlasting kingdom.

VI.

THE NUNC DIMITTIS.

A Homily.

"Nunc dimittis servum Tuum, Domine, secundum verbum Tuum in pace. Quia viderunt oculi mei salutare Tuum, quod parasti ante faciem omnium populorum: Lumen ad revelationem gentium et gloriam plebis Tuæ, Israel."

"Now Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word in peace: Because mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples: A light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel."—Luke II. 29-32.

In the double mystery of our Lord's Presentation in the Temple and our Lady's Purification, there is one scene which the Church loves to keep in perpetual remembrance. It is that of holy Simeon, laden with years and with the merits of a life of faith similar to that of Abraham, suddenly filled to overflowing with the Divine riches of a long-promised grace, holding our Lord in his arms, and announcing Him in his brief canticle of

thanksgiving and praise as the Salvation of God and the Light of the world. Accordingly, on the Feast of the Purification, the Church blesses the candles to be used for the altar, and, in imitation of Simeon, bids her children hold in their hands during the Mass, as they do again on their death-bed, the lighted candles symbolizing that Divine Light of the world, in whom they confess their faith ; whose guidance they seek in life, whose brightness they implore in death.

Again, the words of Simeon's canticle form a prominent portion of the daily prayers of the Church. In the last hour of the Divine Office, that of Compline, when the labours of the day are over, a fitting place is given to that canticle of peace and rest in God. The night which closes over each day's life is taken as a reminder of that night wherein no man can work. Sleep, too, is an image of death, and our Lord, on one memorable occasion, uses both words to signify the same thing.[1] The Psalms of Compline are full of this suggestiveness, the second breaking off abruptly with our Lord's last words upon the cross. Crowning the series the Canticle of Simeon comes last of all, as a fitting expression of those dispositions with which we are to close

[1] "Lazarus our friend sleepeth. Lazarus is dead."—John xi. 11, 14.

the conscious life of the day : an anticipation of the last laying down of the burden of life, and the final closing of our earthly day.

What then were the circumstances in which those words of Simeon were first spoken? We are told of him by St. Luke (II. 25) that he was a man "just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel : and the Holy Ghost was in him. And he had received an answer from the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord." On the day of our Lord's Presentation he "came by the Spirit into the Temple". By the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, he recognizes in our Lord's infant form the promised One of Israel, "the desire of the everlasting hills".[1] Then, taking Him in his arms, he blesses God for the grace and privilege long before promised him, now at length fully realized.

Feeling that his heart's desire is thus given him, and the one sole thought and aspiration of his life thus abundantly satisfied, Simeon breaks forth into his canticle of thanksgiving and praise, and utters his hymn of a happy death. He tells of how God rewards one who has waited patiently for Him, how He crowns hope that is continued in life with a gracious fruition in death. At the

[1] Gen. XLIX. 26.

same time that he tells of the joy that is given him, he makes solemn confession of faith, and proclaims our Lord whom He holds in his arms to be the light of the world and the glory of Israel.

1. "Now thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word in peace." All words are feeble, indeed powerless, to express the wonders of Divine consolations, or the riches of the earthly reward which God has prepared for them that love Him. Yet these beautiful words of Simeon give expression in some degree to the overpowering abundance of peace and joy that had been granted him. In a sense quite the opposite to that in which Elias spoke beneath the shade of the juniper tree, he seems to say: "It is enough, O Lord". Suddenly, as it seemed, the pent-up waters of a great flood were allowed to rush in upon his soul. His spirit is caught as by a mighty tide flowing from the boundless ocean of Divine joy, and he knows of nothing more that he can desire, and nothing more on this earth that can any further enrich or reward him.

The peace which is the stillness of every satisfied desire fills Simeon with its sweetness. It is the peace that passeth all understanding, which the world cannot give: the gift of the Divine Master who has made it His special

bequest to us in the words, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you";[1] the peace with which God rewards all great fidelity in His service. But it is to be noted that this full realization of the Divine promise came as the result of long and patient waiting, in prayer and constant hope for the time in which that promise was to be fulfilled.

We are not explicitly told what age of life Simeon had reached, or what period of time he had waited for the Holy Spirit to make good His word. Probably it was a long, dreary waste of years. So the context seems to indicate—he is described as "waiting" for the consolation of Israel, and the "answer" he had received from the Holy Ghost seems to suggest an unusual lengthening out of life. So, too, the tradition of the Church has generally held. St. Augustine's words, "full of honour and of years"—*sene famoso, annoso*—are well known; and the Fathers all assume that Simeon was venerable by reason of age, and many (e.g. SS. Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius and others) also by reason of his priesthood. He stands out as an instance of the method which God often uses to prove and test us, by making, as it seems to us, slow delay in the fulfilment of His word. That Divine

[1] John xiv. 27.

method is also illustrated in some of the parables of our Lord. The bridegroom is said to "tarry," while the virgins slumbered and slept: the lord of the unjust servant delays to visit his household, so that the servant says in his heart, "my lord is long a coming"; and while the servants would root up the tares for the sake of the wheat, the master says, "Suffer both to grow until the harvest".[1]

The slow unfolding of a great design, the time that is fixed by a Divine choice, the day or hour appointed by Divine Wisdom—is not what man generally anticipates, and patience and faith and hope have to be tried and proved. That is all part of God's method of dealing with us, and it serves to lead us on towards that perfection to which He calls us. Prayer is not granted the self-same moment our words are spoken; Divine promises are not straightway fulfilled before our eyes, because on the one hand God has His appointed time for all things, and on the other a loving constancy of faith and hope must be the very essence of our soul's life in His service.

Thus it is that we must be content to wait, like Simeon, God's appointed time; and our waiting, like his, will be repaid according to the overflowing measure of the goodness of God.

[1] Matt. xxv. 5; Luke xii. 45; Matt. xiii. 30.

The world may move on in its groove of time, years may pass, changes and disappointments may follow close upon each other, perhaps many adversities must be borne; but still in patience we must possess our souls, knowing that God is faithful, that His promises are never forgotten, that they cannot be frustrated or made void except by some unfaithfulness of our own.

There are, of course, unhappy instances of great calls to Divine favour frustrated by human impatience. Saul, the first King of Israel, was commanded by the prophet Samuel, speaking in God's name, to await his coming in Galgal: but the prophet delayed his journey, and Saul seeing his followers gradually fall away from him refused to wait the necessary time. Heedless of the words spoken to him, he offers with sacrilegious hands his unbidden sacrifice to God.[1] But because of his impatience and his disobedience, he forfeits the promises made to him. Similar instances of like impatience with God, resulting in like forfeiture of high privileges and a great vocation, are often enough recorded in the history of the first people of God.

In contrast to all this stands out Simeon's beautiful life of patience and tranquil hope, reaping in due time its reward unfailing, when he is

[1] 1 Kings XIII. 13 and X. 8.

led by the Spirit into the Temple, and not only sees, but holds in his arms the Desired of all nations, the Joy and Crown of all the saints. His canticle is not only a hymn of thanksgiving, but a song of triumph, and an echo of that music which breaks forth from the hearts of saints and fills the courts of the heavenly city of God. It will be well with us, therefore, if we can wait God's time and do not, like Saul, seek to choose our own. Great will be the return when that appointed hour shall come, if only prayer be continued, and the burden of duty faithfully borne, and we have been patient of God's delays, and have preserved the hope that "confoundeth not".[1]

2. "Because mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." It is clear that Simeon is fully enlightened by the grace that came to him. He does not merely see the new-born King of Israel as a temporal prince and deliverer come to "restore the kingdom to Israel,"[2] but recognizes in Him the "salvation of God,"[3] before Whom every valley must be filled and every mountain and hill brought low, Whose name is Emmanuel and Who is called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Prince of Peace, and Father of the world to come.[4] Jacob, in the midst of his prophecy concerning his sons,

[1] Rom. v. 5. [2] Acts i. 6.
[3] Luke iii. 6. [4] Is. ix. 6.

the fathers of the tribes of Israel, breaks out into the words, "I will look for Thy salvation, O Lord".[1] And after him many prophets and kings, as our Lord told His disciples, desired to see the things that it was given to those disciples to see and had not seen them. Only from afar off could they "behold and salute the promises," as the Epistle to the Hebrews says of them:[2] looking out of the darkness of the night for the coming of the day-spring. "Abraham, your father, rejoiced that he might see My day: he saw it and was glad."[3] But Abraham, great as he was, could only see from afar off, either by the light of that revelation which came to him "when the sun was set," and "the lamp of fire passed over" his sacrifice, and God made His covenant with him, opening his eyes to the future;[4] or else from that resting-place of the just, when the special illumination was vouchsafed to him and the mystery of Bethlehem unfolded as the song of the angels was wafted to him.[5]

But to Simeon it was given not to see afar off, but so near that he could say with St. John, "that

[1] Gen. XLIX. 18. [2] Heb. XI. 13.

[3] John VIII. 56. [4] Gen. XV. 17.

[5] Maldonatus holds the latter view—that the revelation was made to Abraham in Limbo; but the bulk of patristic authority is in favour of the former.

which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life".[1] He saw not merely with the outward eye, but with the illuminated vision of the soul, the salvation of God and the Saviour of the world, and took the promised gift direct from the hands of the Divine Giver. Whatever had been the weariness of his years of waiting, all is now divinely compensated. Over those waning hours of life that remained to him were shed the reflection, as it were, of a great glory, and the foretaste of the everlasting peace of God.

May not all who strive faithfully to serve God hope for some similar vision of peace and salvation, like in kind, though not in degree, to that of Simeon, as the crown of an earnest life and of that patience which "hath a perfect work"?[2]

Theophylact points out the application of the opening and closing words of Psalm xc. to Simeon; and we may also humbly hope for their application to ourselves. "He that dwelleth in the aid of the Most High shall abide under the protection of the God of Jacob. . . . I will fill him with length of days, and I will show him My salvation." A dismissal in peace from the

[1] 1 John 1. 1. [2] Jas. 1. 4.

scene of our trials, a sense of the overshadowing presence[1] of our Divine Deliverer, come to us in the Holy Viaticum, a vision of salvation opened by that crowning sacramental grace—that is what we too may hope for if, like Simeon, we wait patiently and prayerfully for the day and hour appointed unto us.

3. "Which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples." That salvation which was "prepared" by God and now made visible to Simeon is chief amongst all His wonderful works. From the beginning of the world, nay, before the beginning of the world and before time was, in the remoteness of "the eternal years,"[2] that mystery of the Incarnation—"the salvation of God"—was prepared and decreed. The eternal Trinity, who had pronounced the original decree of creation, according to the Divine foreknowledge, wherein the future is reflected as in a glass, pronounced also the decree that man, fallen man, must be redeemed and saved. It was the mystery of eternal love "prepared" from before all ages. "*In caritate perpetua dilexi te*—I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee."[3]

The same voice which, in the far-off eternity, proclaimed, "From the womb before the day-

[1] Ps. xc. 4. [2] Ps. lxxvi. 6. [3] Jer. xxxi. 3.

star I begot thee," proclaimed also before the day-star the saving priesthood and mediatorial office of Christ. "The Lord hath sworn, and He will not repent: thou art a priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedech."[1] Because of the Fall, the coming of the Word Incarnate was a coming in the office of Priest, Mediator, and Saviour. But a great and important school of theology teaches that even if there had been no sin and no fall, God's love would have equally "prepared" and accomplished a mystery of the Incarnation. If, in a word, "God so loved the world," *after* its sin, "as to give His only-begotten Son,"[2] it would appear that *without* this sin of the world which the Lamb of God came to take away, God's love must have been equally great and equally productive of good to man. There would in that case have been no Calvary, indeed; but the beautiful mystery of Bethlehem would in some form have taken place. St. Thomas, in his earlier work,[3] thought this opinion equally probable with the contrary one, but later[4] inclined to the view that the Incarnation would not have been wrought unless as a remedy to the

[1] Ps. cix. 3, 4; and Heb. vii. 17.

[2] John iii. 16.

[3] Sent. iii. Dis. 1, q. 1, art. 3. in corp. art.

[4] "Summa," p. iii, q. 1, art. 3.

Fall and a deliverance from the condemnation of sin.

However this may be, the mystery, as it was actually accomplished, was decreed and "prepared" from eternity as a supreme work of Divine love, a "salvation prepared before the face of all peoples". It carried with it, as Simeon announced, that mark of universality or catholicity which specially characterized the new dispensation of love by means of it ushered in.

If the law of fear limited the promises and the hope of the covenant to the natural seed of Abraham, the law of love established in the Incarnation was to embrace every individual soul amongst all the children of men. It was no longer said, as of old, in the mystical words of the prophet, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated".[2]

[1] In addition to Albertus Magnus, Scotus and the ordinary Scotist theologians, Suarez strongly advocates the Scotist theory that the Incarnation would have taken place quite independently of the Fall; as also St. Francis de Sales in his treatise on the Love of God; and, amongst later writers, Scheeben (Wilhelm and Scannell's "Manual," vol. ii. p. 48), and Mgr. Gay in his treatise on Christian Life and Virtues; Newman ("Discourses to Mixed Congregations," 4th edition, pp. 322 and 359); Faber (Blessed Sacrament, Book IV, "Creator and Creature," pp. 39, 99, 121, 146), not to mention many others.

[2] Rom. IX. 13; and Mal. I. 2.

Rather, henceforward, "all peoples" are made heirs of the promises, "all flesh shall see the salvation of God".[1] There shall no longer be any "distinction of the Jew and of the Greek"; "there is neither Gentile nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free".[2]

If any seemed in that law of love to hold Jacob's place of preference and predilection, it would appear to be rather the lowly penitent, or the contrite prodigal, or the lost sheep of the fold. For is it not written that the Divine Shepherd is content to leave the ninety-nine sheep in the mountains and go after that which was lost until He find it? And is it not written again that "there is joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance"?[3] Was it not to the penitent Peter that He gave the charge to feed the whole flock, both lambs and sheep; and was it not to Mary of Magdala, "out of whom He had cast seven devils," that He first appeared on the day of His resurrection?[4]

But to all men, the just and the unjust, to them that are called in the early morning, and to them

[1] Luke III. 6; and Is. XL. 5.
[2] Rom. IX. 12; and Col. III. 11.
[3] Luke XV. 4. [4] Mark XVI. 9.

that come at the eleventh hour of the day, the "salvation of God" is sent, and the grace purchased on Calvary offered. And if there are those who reject the call and refuse the grace, who will wantonly go, like Judas, to their "own place,"[1] they cannot exclude themselves from the all-embracing purpose of the mystery of Redemption, nor detract from the universality of its design, nor destroy the fact that for all, whether they be saved or lost, the Precious Blood has been offered and the gift of salvation "prepared".

4. "A light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel." Simeon, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, still further proclaims the office of our Lord in the world. He is not merely the Saviour or Redeemer of men, but the Light of the world, the Divine Teacher of the souls of men. For our Lord came not only to redeem by His death, but to teach by His words and life. If His death is the source of our life, His life is the light according to which we must live. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men."[2] He came to dispel the darkness that enshrouds both life and death.

Nature, indeed, speaks to us of God and of our moral responsibility. It kindles its light,

[1] Acts i. 25. [2] John i. 4.

however dimly and feebly it may burn, in the hearts and consciences of all men. Yet that light of nature is darkened by the heavy clouds of human passion and sin, until oftentimes it seems to be almost entirely quenched. Mystery then hangs over all things, and life and death becomes enigmas inexplicable. Men grope in the darkness striving to discover some saving ray of truth, as St. Paul said to the Athenians, "that they should seek God, if haply they may feel after Him or find Him".[1] This godless and hopeless darkness may accompany, as was the case with the Athenians themselves, the highest mental culture and the greatest intellectual development. Thus the world, under the influence of its sin, tends towards a spiritual chaos which comes as the penalty of its revolt against the moral order appointed by its Creator.

It is the office of our Lord to make light shine out of the darkness and the void, as in the beginning.[2] Over life and death His Divine Light is cast, and the mystery of our being and the problem of our future are made plain: that whither we go we may know and the way also we may know. The deep melancholy that clouds over a faithless life, the gloom that hangs over a hopeless death, He comes to chase away. For

[1] Acts xvii. 27. [2] 2 Cor. iv. 6.

He is "the Light of the world";[1] He is the Day-spring from on high, visiting us "to enlighten them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death".[2] His teaching and His gift of faith come to turn our night into day, to flood our lives with light. "You were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord."[3] In every circumstance of life, its disappointments, its failures, its struggles with temptation, its burdens or its joys, He is shedding the light of His life upon us, for He has gone before as "the Way and the Truth and the Life".[4]

It is not only from without that He causes the light to shine upon us, through His own and His Church's teaching. There is in addition the inner light which He sends forth to the soul willing to receive it, in that gift of illuminating grace which He has merited for all and desires to communicate to all. There are those who, like the Jews of old, love darkness rather than light: whose evil works the light rebukes or puts to shame, and are therefore said by our Lord to "hate the light". It pierces with disquieting ray the dark places of the conscience and the heart, and nature recoils from its unsparing revelations. Hence it is that a fatal tendency

[1] John VIII. 12. [2] Luke I. 79.
[3] Eph. v. 8. [4] John XIV. 6.

arises to admit just so much as will not grievously disturb the existing condition of things, and no more. Principles are brought down to the level of practice; faith is reduced to the level of conduct; and a light that is importunate, reproachful, and condemnatory is rejected, or but so imperfectly admitted as to be powerless.

If there is in our higher nature a craving for light, an "anima naturaliter Christiana,"[1] there is in our lower nature also a repugnance to light, a wish *not* to believe, when faith can only condemn the objects of the heart's idolatry. Our Lord said accordingly, "Every one that doth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, that his works may not be reproved. But he that doth truth cometh to the light."[2] It is evident that fidelity to the light of God must often cost nature some pain and sacrifice. When St. Paul yielded to that light on his way to Damascus, it was said of him: "I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake".[3] When the Magi followed the star to Bethlehem, their obedience to light cost them no small earthly sacrifice, even though it brought with it so great a spiritual reward. The first disciples of our Lord, and after them the Christians of the first

[1] A soul by its very nature Christian.—*Tertullian.*

[2] John III. 20, 21. [3] Acts IX. 16.

ages of the Church, were in general called to make the sacrifice of all things in order to gain Christ and His kingdom. But the light which guided them revealed the abundance of the gain and the littleness of the loss. It made them ready, with the Apostle, to count all things loss that they might gain Christ.[1] For whensoever that light of grace carries with it an imperious call to do or suffer for the name of Him who gives it, it is but the prelude and promise of the light that knows no setting,[2] of the everlasting brightness of the city of God. Of him who follows it, it is written that his path "goeth forward and increaseth even unto perfect day".[3]

But as our Lord is the Light of the world, so finally does Simeon proclaim Him "the glory of Thy people Israel". It is noteworthy that practically four titles are attributed to our Lord in Simeon's canticle, a fourfold confession of faith. He is the author of that peace which filled the prophet's soul—our Peace-giver. Secondly, He is our Salvation, the Saviour of men. Thirdly, He is the Light of the world. Lastly, He is the Glory of His people.

Doubtless our Lord was in a special sense the

[1] Phil. III. 8.

[2] Ille lucifer qui nescit occasum. Off. sab. sanct.

[3] Prov. IV. 18.

glory of that people of whom He was born according to the flesh, the Son of David and Child of Mary. But as St. Paul wrote, quoting the prophet's words, "It shall be in the place where it was said unto them, you are not My people; there they shall be called the sons of the living God".[1] Another prophet breaks forth into the words, "O Israel, how great is the house of God, and how vast is the place of His possession".[2] Of that vast family of His people on earth, of the great multitude which no man can number, gathered from all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues, who stand before His throne, He is the Glory and the Crown. He leads them through the darkness and great tribulation of their desert pilgrimage unto their home amongst the many mansions of His Father's house. He desires that they should see in Him their true glory on earth, even when He comes to them with a cross which they must bear after Him. They need have no reason to fear the shadow of that cross; rather may they, like the Apostle, glory in it,[3] for it is the sure bond of fellowship between disciple and Master on earth, and the pledge of union with Him in His kingdom. Such was it on Calvary to the penitent thief.

[1] Rom. IX. 26; Os. I. 10. [2] Bar. III. 24.
[3] Gal. VI. 14.

Such has it been since to many a soul that has shared the grace of Dismas.

With Simeon, therefore, we confess our Lord to be our present and future glory. Outside of Him there is no true glory; apart from Him there is no hope of such. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." "Thou art my glory and the lifter-up of my head."[1] Without His presence and the consolation of His grace and love all the glory of the earth is but a mockery of the soul's deepest yearnings. With Him all bitterness can be made sweet and all loss turned into gain.

And when earth's winter is past, and the rain is over and gone, and the voice of the Beloved has sounded in the soul's ear,[2] and the words, "Come, O blessed of My Father," have been pronounced, then it is in the fullest sense that He is the glory of His people. The glory that was His before the world was He unfolds to them, and they share it with Him as a promised gift of joy, eternal and inalienable.[3] "We all, beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord."[4] It is not a passing vision, as when Peter saw the transfiguration of

[1] John VI. 69; and Ps. III. 4.
[2] Cant. II. 10, 11.
[3] John XVI. 22.
[4] 2 Cor. III. 18.

the Sacred Humanity of our Lord, and in his rapture exclaimed, "Lord, it is good for us to be here," but the vision of the glory of the Godhead as well as of the Sacred Humanity, and that with no earthly cloud, or fear of loss, or alloy of sadness. "Transformed into the same image, from glory to glory"—thus St. Paul describes the effect of that vision upon us.

There, indeed, is our Lord the glory of His people, the spiritual Israel of God. Thither may His grace lead us! Thither may He come in the Holy Viaticum, His gift of love, to take us! And when our hour is come, may we be able to utter in Simeon's spirit and with Simeon's grace the words of his canticle, "Nunc dimittis servum Tuum, Domine, secundum verbum Tuum in pace".

VII.

PONTIUS PILATE.

"Et vinctum adduxerunt eum et tradiderunt Pontio Pilato præsidi."

"And they brought Him bound, and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate, the governor."—Matt. xxvii. 2.

THERE is but one name connected with our Lord's death in the Creed, and it is remarkable enough that that name is the name of Pilate, the judge who unwillingly condemned Him. It is, of course, only for historical and chronological reasons that Pilate is mentioned, for the Creed states in that manner the time and place of our Lord's death, inasmuch as Pilate was the Roman procurator of Judea under the Emperor Tiberius. Still, that one name perpetuated in the Creed carries with it the lesson to all ages that weakness and cowardice, love of worldly favour and fear of worldly loss may be the causes of sins just as great as those which spring from the worst malice of the will or the deepest corruption of the heart.

I. We learn from Josephus that Pilate had from the first made himself unpopular with the Jews by introducing into Jerusalem the figures of the Emperor and of heathen gods. Then the Gospel tells us how he mingled the blood of the Galileans with their sacrifices in the Temple,[1] savagely quelling a commotion by a massacre. On his part, he betrays unreservedly his contempt for the Pharisaic leaders of the Jews who sought to make him their tool. "Shall I crucify your King?" is his rejoinder to their cries of "Crucify Him". When they ask him to correct the title of the cross which he had chosen, suggesting that for "King of the Jews" the title might read "self-called King of the Jews," Pilate curtly dismisses them with the words, "What I have written, I have written".[2] Yet in spite of his Roman pride and haughtiness, deference mingled with scorn, and fear mingled with contempt of that people who aimed at making him the obedient instrument of their will. They could accuse him to his imperial master, they could menace his official prospects, they could become a dangerous stumbling-block in the path of his natural ambition.

The first display of character which Pilate makes, when confronted with the Pharisaic and

[1] Luke XIII. 1. [2] John XIX. 22.

priestly enemies of our Lord, is one in which he stands out in favourable contrast to them by the regard which he manifests for the outward forms of justice. They did not propose any form of trial, but demanded a sentence of death to be pronounced at their dictation. Pilate recalls them to a sense of justice by the question, "What accusation bring you against this man?"[1] They proudly answer, as claiming for themselves the right to acquit or condemn, "If He were not a malefactor we would not have delivered Him up unto thee". Pilate begins to examine our Lord, and it was in answer to his question, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" that our Lord answered, "My Kingdom is not of this world". He was indeed a King, but one born and come into this world that He "should give testimony of the truth".[2] Pilate is persuaded of His innocence and proclaims, "I find no cause in Him".

If Pilate had ended there, and adhered to his sense of justice and the strong dictate of conscience within him, all would have been well. But he had his other ends and aims. He had his fear of danger to his official advancement. He had his absorbing ambition for success in the imperial world of honour and wealth. He had to win his

[1] John xviii. 29. [2] Ib. v. 37.

reputation for wise and peaceful administration. He had to secure his own prospects, guard his present position, establish himself in the career of material prosperity which was to him the term and goal of his supreme desire. He would avoid, if possible, any direct conflict between conscience and criminal expediency, between duty and self-interest. He does not wish to commit injustice, much less a judicial murder. He does not wish to associate himself with the sin of malicious men, hounding the innocent to death. He resorts, therefore, to certain devices, which he hopes will satisfy both conscience and expediency. It was a poor effort of worldly wisdom, which alas! cannot much avail when it is confronted with the superior wisdom of the devil, and the unrelenting malice and obstinacy with which evil forces its warfare against good.

Pilate's first device to escape from this difficulty of choosing between right and wrong is to throw his burden on to other shoulders. Hearing that our Lord came from Galilee, and Herod its tetrarch being in Jerusalem at the time, he sends our Lord on to Herod as a subject of the tetrarch's jurisdiction. The result is just as Pilate had thought and wished. Herod, too, found no cause of guilt in Him.[1] Pilate can appeal to Herod's

[1] Luke xxiii. 15.

agreement with himself as a just reason for acquitting our Lord. But he is dealing with men, and with a power behind them, that take little heed either of justice or of truth. They care not for Herod's opinion any more than for Pilate's. They continue their threatening clamour, and force their demand all the more violently according as they perceive the weak and evasive resistance offered to them.

His first effort has failed, and he now bethinks him of a second device, which seems to promise relief from the pressure of his difficulty. It is the passover, and there is under sentence of death a notorious robber and murderer, Barabbas, such as men commonly breathe more freely to think beyond the reach of doing any more harm. Pilate avails himself of the paschal custom of releasing a condemned prisoner, and places our Lord, uncondemned as He still is, by the side of Barabbas, bidding the multitude choose and decide which of the two shall be released. It was natural to suppose that no reasonable men could fail to choose Jesus rather than Barabbas. But here, again, passion is not reasonable, sin is tyrannical in its persistence, and, like a storm-swept sea, grows all the more violent as it finds obstacles opposed to it. The crowd, swayed by the chief priests and Pharisees, cry out in answer

to Pilate, "Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas".[1]

A second time Pilate has failed, and his latter plight is even worse than his first. A duty evaded, a principle compromised, a conscience more than half cheated do not lessen the difficulties of resisting temptation and avoiding wrong. All experience points to the fact that it is easier to overcome a difficulty in its first beginnings than in its later development. Compromise with evil, or with temptation, does not lessen its force but rather feeds its flame and intensifies its violence. So Pilate found. Before this unnatural association of Jesus with Barabbas, of Christ with Belial, it would have been easier than it afterwards became to declare his fidelity to duty, to pronounce our Lord's acquittal, to uphold justice and oppose iniquity. The first great duty of life, fidelity to God and His law, cannot be evaded, and it is easiest as well as best to declare for that supreme claim from the very first, to reassert consistently the choice, and to leave the result to Him who is able both to strengthen the weak and to reward the strong.

A third device now suggests itself to the timid and troubled mind of Pilate. But it is far more unjust, far more ignominiously unworthy of him

[1] Luke xxiii. 18.

than the preceding ones. He has been yielding so much that the disposition to yield more has grown upon him, and made him callous and blind to wrong and injustice. Moreover, the evil nature of what he is tempted to do is brought into all the more prominent relief from the warning that unexpectedly comes to him. In the midst of the tumult and confusion, in the crisis of the struggle that is going on within his soul, the message comes to him from his wife, " Have thou nothing to do with that just man. For I have suffered many things in a dream this day because of Him." [1]

Here was a warning having about it all the authority of a prophetical message, a voice from without corroborating the command of the voice within, an inspiration, as it must have seemed, from the Divine Author of conscience calling to a supreme act of duty, a final assertion of truth and right. The strange source of the warning, and the circumstance of its coming from one who could not have had, humanly speaking, any interest in or knowledge of the events that were taking place, all pointed to the mandate of that higher Power, as whose instrument the wife of the judge seemed to have been chosen. Pilate, however, is endeavouring to serve two masters,

[1] Matt. xxvii. 19.

and the hour of trial shows clearly enough which of the two is predominant within him. His final effort has nothing to justify it. He foolishly seeks by going half-way in crime to satisfy the demand for crime, by unjustly drawing some blood to quench the thirst for blood. "I will chastise Him, and let Him go."[1]

In the same breath in which he says, "Why, what evil hath this man done? I find no cause of death in Him," he sentences the innocent to the cruel penalty of scourging, such as was inflicted upon a slave, or a criminal about to undergo the death-penalty. He hopes thus to appeal to a lingering sense of humanity and justice, when the victim of all the outcry is seen to have suffered so pitiably. A scourging, such as Roman law allowed to be inflicted upon a slave, ought surely to be enough to satisfy men seeking vengeance upon their worst enemy. His sentence is carried out, doubtless far beyond his own wish, by the soldiers under his command; and they, in their unrestrained lust of cruelty, add to the outrage the further indignity of crowning their Victim with thorns, and brutally performing the jest of doing Him homage with violence as a mock king. All this serves Pilate's purpose, inasmuch as his desire is to show the ignominious punishment

[1] Luke xxiii. 22.

already inflicted, and lead the crowd, thus seeing the shame and suffering of their victim, to cry "Enough".

But here again Pilate fails, and fails finally in his attempt to avoid crime by compounding with crime. Alas! evil is too overbearing in its essence, sin is too much more disposed to increase rather than lessen its demands for such measures of compromise to succeed in dismissing it. Pilate discovers that it is of no use to violate conscience, even with the motive of afterwards saving conscience: that it is a vain and foolish hope that would suggest the commission of a lesser sin, in order to escape the temptation of yielding to a greater sin. He has satisfied no one concerned, neither the fierce multitude, nor the innocent Victim, nor his own conscience. The cry resounds all the louder, and the demand becomes more imperious and threatening. He hears the final threat, "If thou release this man thou art not Cæsar's friend. For whosoever maketh himself a King speaketh against Cæsar."[1]

He begins to fear for his own safety, and gives up the struggle for justice. He yields to the demand made upon him, he becomes an accomplice, nay takes the leading part in the shedding of innocent blood. In spite of the mysterious

[1] John xix. 12.

warning sent him from one supernaturally enlightened : in spite of his own declaration as to the innocence of the accused : in spite of his own self-rebuking conscience, he hands himself over to the guilty design of the chief priests, takes up his judicial function and pronounces the desired condemnation.

So, step by step, Pilate allows himself to be forced into a lesser and then a greater sin, and becomes, unwillingly and yet wilfully, the chief agent in the darkest deed of evil that men have wrought against God.

It was, of course, only in keeping with his weak resistance to the wrong he committed that Pilate took water and washed his hands, to signify his non-acceptance of responsibility for the shedding of innocent blood. Unwilling as he was to do evil, yet he did the evil : revolted at the demand to condemn, he yet pronounced the condemnation. Conscience cannot, indeed, be thus easily cheated, nor can guilt thus easily be disclaimed. Upon Pilate, as upon others more full of iniquity than himself, rests the stain of that blood of which he claimed ineffectually to be innocent, and weakness must share with malice the full guilt of earth's greatest sin.

It is a living instance of the depths to which moral weakness of the will may descend : how a

mere half-hearted allegiance to the first great principles of right and duty may lead to the lowest degradation, and associate a man with all that is worst in human nature. Mere evasions of duty, when the call comes to render to God that which is God's, self-indulgent fear in the face of a moral enemy, still more, all concessions to evil or the violence of temptation can only end in spiritual loss and moral disaster.

II. In all probability Pilate typifies in the faults of his character the great majority of men in their spiritual failures. It is not the common bent of human nature to wage direct war against duty and truth. Perverted minds and hearts may doubtless be found who so act. Yet the sinister influences that are from time to time roused against us find in us more of weak purpose than actual love of evil for its own sake. In the process of temptation, any such infirmity of will is unmistakably discovered. "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired you that he might sift you as wheat."[1] In that sifting of the soul the weak point of its spiritual life must show itself, and thence becomes the object of persistent attack. A radical defect, if such there be, in the firmness of its grasp of the first principles of conscience will make itself too plainly manifest. A secret disease of the will,

[1] Luke xxii. 31.

which enfeebles and relaxes its allegiance to the first great law presented to it—"Thou shalt not have strange gods before Me"—will surely in the hour of trial bring grave danger with it.

It is not possible, moreover, to be purely passive and neutral in relation to the evil influences which at times surround us. Those influences may be either falsely insinuating or violently threatening. But to avoid complicity in sin, it is oftentimes necessary by a strong hold of nature's first principles and a firm allegiance to God's first law to openly oppose the evil, and declare a simple and direct antagonism to sin.

The Psalmist prayed, "From my secret sins cleanse me, O Lord, and from those of others save Thy servant".[1] We may well pray for deliverance from the secret sources of evil lurking within us; from those latent defects that grow unobserved until they produce their fatal fruit. From complicity in the pursuit of sinful ends by those who would have us join them, from sharing through our feeble acquiescence or our merely passive evasion in the evil designs which we are tempted to promote, we need the strengthening grace for which the Psalmist prayed. May that grace not fail us, nor we

[1] Ps. xviii. 13.

prove unfaithful to its inspirations when the day of trial comes to us.

Pilate, we are told, did not profit by his surrender of principle to the chief priests and enemies of our Lord. Only a little later he was accused by the Samaritans of an act of tyranny, vainly sought to defend himself at the imperial court, and in the reign following that of Tiberius fell into disgrace and was ordered into exile. Mediaeval traditions speak of his banishment to Gaul, and of his ending his days at Vienne, according to legend taking his own life in the bitterness of his remorse and disappointment. Some few of the Fathers, however, hold a more hopeful and lenient view than that of the legends. They point to our Lord's words mitigating the personal guilt of Pilate—"He that hath delivered Me to thee hath the greater sin".[1] They look upon his efforts to obtain our Lord's release as predisposing him for the Divine mercy. They hope that he, too, obtained like the good thief the gift of repentance and of faith.[2] May it indeed be found so to be. But while we remain without certain knowledge of Pilate's end,

[1] John XIX. 11.

[2] Tertullian has the words—"Ea omnia super Christo Pilatus, et ipse jam pro sua conscientia Christianus, Cæsari tunc Tiberio nuntiavit".—Apol. cap. 21.

whether repentant or unrepentant, of his sin we are fully told, and of the part he played in the condemnation of the Son of God. The story of his fall serves us as a warning against that moral weakness which shrinks from open opposition to evil, or which seeks by the path of compromise to escape the spiritual ruin which sin entails.

VIII.

CAIPHAS.[1]

"Erat autem Caiphas, qui consilium dederat Judaeis, quia expedit unum hominem mori pro populo."

"Now Caiphas was he who had given the counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people."—John xviii. 14.

It is clear that the first-fruits of the mystery of the Incarnation, and the first places in the new Kingdom of God which our Lord came to found, were Divinely intended for the Israelite people. They were the children of Abraham, the heirs of the promises, the people of election, the mystical Jacob whom the Lord loved, in contradistinction to Esau whom He loved not. They were our Lord's own brethren in the flesh, and to them His heart first turned, to them His Divine message was first addressed, even though they returned Him no more love or consideration than the brethren of Joseph did to the patriarch of old.

[1] The Vulgate rendering of the name is here followed.

His design of predilection towards them is made clear in His own words and declarations. To the Canaanite woman He said: "I was not sent but to the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel".[1] The first charge given to the Apostles when sent forth on their mission was: "Go ye not into the way of the Gentiles, and into the city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go ye rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."[2] Similarly St. Paul says in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia: "To you it behoved us first to speak the word of God: but because you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life; behold, we turn to the Gentiles".[3]

Again, it is equally clear that the chief cause of the rejection by the Jewish people of Christ and His Kingdom, and of their own consequent rejection afterwards, is to be found in the action of their spiritual leaders, the official representatives of the Jewish Church. Whatever opposition was made to the gospel, and to the new revelation of the Kingdom of God, was instigated by them, led by them, carried to its consummation by them. Those who hurried to Pilate's hall on the parasceve of the passover, who cried for the blood of Christ and yet scrupled to cross the governor's threshold, lest they should be

[1] Matt. xv. 24. [2] Ib. x. 5, 6. [3] Acts xiii. 4-6.

defiled and unable to eat the paschal supper, were the chief priests, the duly authorized masters in Israel. It is a strange perversion of Divine purposes, a strange illustration of the degree to which a deep-seated flaw in the characters and hearts of men may transform them from ministers of grace into instruments of destruction.

In the preliminary stage of the gospel's approach to them, when John the Baptist, sprung though he was from amongst themselves, first heralded the coming of the Kingdom of God, they felt instinctively that the Spirit breathing in his message was not the spirit which animated their own hearts; and they forthwith declared against him. His reputation was too great amongst the people, his sanctity too conspicuous, for them to use force to suppress him. When our Lord asked, "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or from men?"[1] they cautiously answered, "we know not"; just because, as St. Matthew tells us, they did not wish openly to proclaim their disbelief in him, and thus outrage the convictions of the people. But they felt the same instinct of opposition and the same sense of contradiction between the holy Baptist and themselves, that afterwards found its full development and its final counterpart when

[1] Matt. xxi. 25.

our Lord came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom.

It was not that the priesthood, as a whole, rejected the gospel any more than the people, as a whole, did. For just as we find the "remnant"[1] that was left of the people supplying the first disciples of the gospel, the founders of the Christian Church and apostolic princes of the Kingdom of Christ, so are we told in the Acts of the Apostles that "a great multitude also of the priests obeyed the faith".[2] Not wholly, therefore, did the ancient priesthood fail, despite the failure of its unworthy leaders to receive the grace and truth vouchsafed to it. Still, it is the sad fact that the high priest, Caiphas, the ex-high priest, Annas, the leaders of the Sanhedrin, the great majority of the chief priests and doctors of the law saw in Jesus of Nazareth a kind of natural enemy, and leagued themselves together to frustrate His mission and to procure His death.

They were not disposed to see the designs of God, or humbly to accept them, and as they could only distinguish in the Author of the new dispensation an influence opposed to themselves, they strove by every means in their power against Him. The Pharisees amongst them had lost all

[1] Rom. xi. 5. [2] Acts vi. 7.

sense of the weightier things of the law, and had come to measure all spiritual perfection by the number and exactitude of their outward observances. Religion with them no longer hid itself in the sanctuary of the heart, or felt any shrinking from the eyes of men, but loved rather to display itself before the world, and profit as much as possible from the world's recognition. It affected an air of spiritual and intellectual superiority over the rest of men—"this multitude that knoweth not the law are accursed".[1] The Sadducees, to which sect both Annas and Caiphas belonged—for the Acts of the Apostles tell us "the high priest and all that were with him were of the heresy of the Sadducees"[2]—possessed all the pride and spiritual unreality of the Pharisees, with their own peculiar materialism and unbelief. Their scoffs at the doctrine of the Resurrection were not likely to elevate their standard of spiritual aspiration, and they took with bitter resentment their confusion, when on a memorable occasion our Lord established against them the great truth that God was "not the God of the dead, but of the living".[3]

Possessed by the thought of their own importance, scorning all knowledge which was not derived from themselves, assured in the midst of

[1] John vii. 49. [2] Acts v. 17. [3] Matt. xxii. 32.

a deep spiritual blindness that they alone were leaders of the blind, both Pharisee and Sadducee were but too readily predisposed to resist a teacher who was neither of them nor with them, but claimed an authority direct from God. The spirit of the world and the spirit of God, the spirit of pride and the spirit that breathes wherever it goes a Divine humility, these are contrary one to another, and between them the old warfare is ever likely to break out. Therefore, Caiphas, the high priest, the leader of the Sanhedrin, whom we may take as representing in his words and acts the embodiment of spiritual pride, finds himself arrayed against Christ.

I. The first occasion on which Caiphas declares himself and makes manifest the spirit that is in him is at that Council which assembled after our Lord had startled so many in Jerusalem by the raising of Lazarus. "What do we, for this man doth many miracles? If we let Him alone so, all will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away our place and nation."[1] Strange confession on their part! "This man doth many miracles"—showing how amongst themselves, however differently they spoke amongst the people, they admitted the truth of Christ's miracles. A strange conclusion also—"all will believe in

[1] John xi. 47, 48.

Him, and the Romans will come and take away our place and nation". For, in point of fact and as matter of history, it was just because they did not believe in Him that they afterwards provoked the vengeance of Rome, and, in the national cataclysm which followed, those who escaped destruction in Jerusalem were precisely those Christians who, having been warned by prophecy, made timely flight from the doomed city. So does human foresight fail, so does human reason falsify itself when it strives to contend in judgment with God.

The Council itself, assembled as it was against Christ, seems to resemble nothing so much as a senate of fallen spirits, bent on securing at all costs their own ascendancy. Feebler intelligences amongst them argue with no definite result, as to what measures they must needs take to frustrate a design higher and greater than any they have had in view. Weakly they grope in search of clear, definite counsel as to how they shall secure their own ends, how beat down whatsoever is a menace to them. Then a master spirit arises. The pride of a clearer intelligence, the scorn of a more malignant will show themselves in his first words. They, with dimmer vision, or with some vestige of scruple left to fetter conscience, shrink from an open demand

for blood. He, with the instinct that inspired Cain and the pride of a fallen archangel, derides their hesitation and imposes upon them the fixed determination of his own imperious will. "You know nothing. Neither do you consider that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." [1]

Thus disdainfully does he dismiss further discussion and peremptorily lay down as final the judgment intuitively perceived in his own mind. He has no fears or scruples : but if some pretext must be found to satisfy the timid-minded, then let it be their sufficient justification that it is expedient to take up arms against a common danger and a common enemy. The nation's safety and their own is at stake, and there is no alternative but to sacrifice one instead of many, to condemn the innocent for the common weal.

"It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people." The inner mind and heart of Caiphas are plainly visible in his words—his malice without fear, his pride without scruple, his audacity without remorse. In reality, there is but little difference between the mental attitude of Caiphas and that displayed by Herod the Great when first he heard of the new-born King of the Jews. Herod's immediate fear was that

[1] John xi. 49, 50.

a rival interest to his own had sprung up, and his main prepossession was to secure his own personal position at any cost, even that of blood. With a slight variation in the circumstances, and a kind of official mingling of heaven with earth in his motives, Caiphas looked with similar prepossessions on the rising influence of Christ.

The peculiarity of the spiritual ruler was that he sought a pretext of justice and patriotism and righteousness for the crime which he strove to get accomplished. "The hour cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doth a service to God," our Lord said to His disciples.[1] Certainly it would have been the boast of Caiphas that in the counsel he gave, and in the efforts made to carry that counsel into effect, he was performing a high act of religion and doing "a service to God". Thus, in blindness of heart, man makes war upon God; and thus, too, the chief bearer of the priestly office and dignity becomes the chief enemy of Him whom he professes to serve. If Christ is typified in Abel the just, to whose sacrifice "the Lord had respect," then surely Caiphas is the antitype of him to whose sacrifice "the Lord had no respect,"[2] and the dark thoughts of Cain find expression in the words spoken by Caiphas.

[1] John xvi. 2. [2] Gen. iv. 4, 5.

Yet, in the utterance of Caiphas there was something far beyond the scope of his own thoughts, a Divine counsel and a majestic truth, of which he had no knowledge or suspicion. All unwittingly he proclaimed a truth which is the very foundation of the New Covenant, the corner-stone of Christian faith, the ground of Christian hope. St. John explains to us that in the true and higher sense of his words, "This he spoke not of himself: but being the high priest of that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation. And not only for the nation, but to gather together in one the children of God that were dispersed."[1]

Just as God finds even in the worst of men instruments for the fulfilment of prophecy, accomplishing Divine predictions though they know it not, so may it well be with others who serve as instruments, unconscious though they be, for giving voice to prophecy. So was it with the corrupt Balaam, overruled by the Spirit of God in the utterance of his prophetic blessing. So was it, St. John explains, with Caiphas, for despite his unworthiness he was a high priest of the God of truth. It is a notable example of the common teaching of Holy Scripture, showing how the powers and prerogatives of a sacred

[1] John xi. 51, 52.

office have their full force and efficacy, in spite of the personal unworthiness of the bearer. Caiphas the man could not destroy, by his sinful personality, the office of Caiphas the priest. However unholy its human representative, the priesthood remains in itself holy, sacred, Divine, depending for the exercise of its prerogatives not on man, but on God. Thus it is that even Caiphas may prophesy.

II. The most important part, however, which Caiphas plays in relation to our Lord's Passion was not that which was performed at this first assembly, but that which he enacts in the later gathering of the Sanhedrin, when Judas has performed his task, and our Lord is arraigned before the chief Council of the nation. Over that solemn assembly Caiphas presides as judge. It is typical of the justice which they are prepared to administer on this great occasion, that the judge himself has already pronounced in advance the death-sentence of the accused. It is noteworthy, too, that the others had accepted the sentence thus delivered without any regard to the immediate merits of the case, but for what they deemed considerations of high political expediency. It was only needed to clothe that foregone conclusion with some decent observance of the outward forms of justice, before the judge and the Council

gave final expression to their solemn verdict. Hence there must be the usual adjuncts of a trial at law. There is an examination of the accused by the judge, there are witnesses, there is an opportunity given to the accused to reply in answer to the evidence brought against him.

In the first stage of the trial, when our Lord is before the ex-high priest, Annas,[1] who doubtless acts for the moment for Caiphas, and when the examining judge asks concerning His doctrine and His disciples, He simply refers the judge and Council to His words spoken openly to the world, and to those who have heard Him. He suffers with Divine meekness the blow which the menial in the court rudely deals Him, but He will not rest under the imputation of having offered dishonour to the high priest. That would be a contradiction to His whole life, and to the entire spirit of His teaching. He had ever taught deference and obedience to them that sat in the chair of Moses.[2] Even to Cæsar he had taught men to render that which was Cæsar's due. Therefore, He vindicates Himself from the charge of disregarding an authority which, in reality, He had Himself ordained. Neither to Annas nor to Caiphas, even though the priestly office could never be more unworthily represented,

[1] John xviii. 13. [2] Matt. xxiii. 2.

will He acknowledge any failure of outward respect. "If I have spoken evil, give testimony of the evil."[1] But as to His doctrine and His disciples He is silent, for it would be superfluous on His part to aid malice to gain its ends.

Before Caiphas, at the later stage of the trial, witnesses are produced. But their evidence is not only a glaring perversion of the truth, they are mutually contradictory.[2] Again the high priest appeals for words, calling for some form of defence on the part of the accused. "Answerest thou nothing to the things that are laid to Thy charge by these men? But He held His peace and answered nothing."[3] In effect, so far as justice was concerned, a defence was unseemly where there was no ground afforded for accusation; and where injustice was already in possession of men's minds, words were only too likely to be perverted from truth to falsehood. Therefore is the Divine Victim silent.

In its deeper significance, that silence is, moreover, an illustration of the common law of God's action in His dealings with men. He does not usually speak to the unwilling ear, nor does He unfold His truth to the heart that is already in revolt against Truth. To Caiphas,

[1] John xviii. 23. [2] Mark xiv. 59.
[3] Ib. 60, 61.

accordingly, our Lord is silent, and simply accomplishes the prophet's words: "He shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer, and He shall not open His mouth".[1] Thus far no progress has been made by judge or council towards the end for which they are assembled. All efforts to find grounds of condemnation have failed, and there remains but one means to procure matter for the prearranged sentence. The silence of the accused must be broken, His mouth unlocked. Caiphas rises, and making solemn invocation of the name of the living God appeals in that name to Him who has ever sought to glorify it: "I adjure Thee by the living God that Thou tell us if Thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith to him: Thou hast said it."[2] It is essential to bear in mind the meaning of these words as uttered by Caiphas. Did Christ really claim Divinity?—thereby, as Caiphas would infer, laying Himself open to the charge of blasphemy and the sentence of death. Our Lord is solemnly adjured to answer the question in the sense of him who asked it. In any other sense, it could not entail condemnation or death. In St. Mark's words, He not only plainly affirms, but amplifies the affirmation, claiming a supreme Judgeship and describing His coming in the

[1] Is. LIII. 7. [2] Matt. XXVI. 63, 64.

clouds of heaven to exercise it. "Jesus said to him: I am. And you shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of the power of God, and coming with the clouds of heaven." [1]

Fully realizing the consequences of His words, yet responding to the solemn adjuration addressed to Him, He makes similarly solemn declaration of His Divinity, and calmly allows the Council to take His declaration as, in itself, sufficient ground for the sentence of death. Caiphas rends his garments and says: "What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard the blasphemy: what think you? But they answering said, He is guilty of death." [2]

Here, then, we have the most solemn occasion of our Lord's life. He is before the Council of the nation. He is being judged practically upon one point, and one point alone. Does He lay claim to Divinity? Such a claim, Caiphas and the Sanhedrin rightly assume, it would be blasphemy for a mere man to make. Death being the consequence of His affirmation, we can conceive no more solemn circumstances, no more momentous issues, no more fitting occasion for the clear pronouncement on the part of our Lord of the great doctrine of His Divine Personality. In fact, Caiphas has again become the unwitting

[1] Mark xiv. 62. [2] Matt. xxvi. 65, 66.

instrument of a Providential design. How could a crucial question be more plainly put, how could a solemn declaration of Divine Truth be more clearly evoked? Evil though the purpose of the question was, yet despite himself did Caiphas render a service to the minds and hearts of men, when he drew forth that direct and simple statement of the life-giving truth that Christ is God.

It is a strange spectacle. Divine Truth is standing at the bar of human judgment, Divine Justice arraigned before a human tribunal, and men pronounce a blind condemnation upon God. Caiphas practically dictates the sentence to be pronounced, yet he finds the others in full and ready agreement with him. "He is guilty of death." What a revelation of the folly and injustice of the judgments of men! "To me it is a very small thing to be judged by you, or by man's day,"[1] St. Paul exclaimed. The trial and condemnation of the Saviour of the world, by that very world He came to save, is intended to convey its lesson to all men, that they may never be disheartened in the pursuit of Divine ends by the ill-favour and adverse judgment of the world in their regard. The common weakness of human respect, which often withholds from good, or incites to evil, is shown to have the poorest

[1] 1 Cor. iv. 5.

of all foundations. It rests upon the errors, or prejudices, or passions of men, upon judgments which are certain, in the final adjustment of things, to be reversed.

The chief gift of God has come to men, His saving Truth. Yet it cannot act in their behalf independently of human nature. It needs conditions in the souls of men for its fruitful reception. It may bring with it a rude shock to minds already filled with established ideas and humanly formed opinions. Doubtless this was the case with Caiphas and the Pharisees, as it was also with Saul, when blinded by the light that burst upon him on his way to Damascus. If men are willing to be humble recipients of the Divine light, then they will readily sacrifice the cherished illusions of their former darkness. If, on the other hand, they will not humbly receive a Truth that is unwelcome to their lower selves ; if pride, or self-love is unwilling to sacrifice the false for the true, then resentment and revolt break out into open warfare, and that which is by Divine right the object of the mind's allegiance becomes only a mark for contradiction and attack. "This Child is set for the resurrection and the fall of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted," [1] Simeon foretold,

[1] Luke II. 34.

and his words point to the two contrary conditions, according to which men may be saved or condemned by the same Divine gift, bestowed in the same measure upon them.

Caiphas does not seem to have profited much, even from a worldly point of view, by his sin and injustice. A little later he was deposed from the high priesthood by the Romans, and saw another fill his place. His further career is unknown. But what we do know, from our Lord's words of prophecy addressed to him, is that a day awaits him, and those who have sided in false judgment with him, when there can be no more blindness to the Truth, when they must stand confronted with the Supreme Judge who comes in the clouds of heaven, and when they must recognize in that Judge Him whom they once wantonly rejected and unjustly condemned. In that great day, from the fate of Caiphas and his like, Sweet Jesus, deliver us.

IX.

HEROD ANTIPAS.

"Sprevit autem illum Herodes cum exercitu suo, et illusit indutum veste alba, et remisit ad Pilatum."

"And Herod with his army set Him at nought, and mocked Him, putting on Him a white garment, and sent Him back to Pilate."—Luke XXIII. 11.

If, amongst those brought into contact with our Lord in His Passion, Pilate stands as a type of moral weakness, and Caiphas of spiritual pride, we have in Herod the lower type of a sensualist, living in open defiance of every moral code, Divine and human. It is instructive to follow our Lord's manner of acting with such a character as this.

I. Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great and heir to the northern portion of his father's kingdom, was scarcely likely to inherit from that father many of the noble qualities of human nature. After having married the daughter of Aretas, King of Damascus, he made proposals to the wife of his half-brother Philip to quit her law-

ful husband and marry him, while he in his turn discarded the daughter of Aretas. Thus in unblushing disregard of every moral law, whether of Jew or Gentile, Herod lived with Herodias, his brother's wife, making her to appear as his own, and demanding for her as such full public recognition.

A mind so enslaved by sensual influences might naturally appear to have stifled within itself all religious sense, and to have accepted as inevitable its own degradation. Yet this was not wholly the case with Herod. In the midst of his spiritual degeneracy, there is something which seems like a feeble element of religion striving to maintain a survival in his soul. It was not to be expected that such a mind as his would have sought or found satisfaction in the austere preaching of St. John the Baptist. Yet, St. Mark tells us that Herod, after having at the wish of Herodias cast St. John into prison, all the while "feared John, knowing him to be a just and holy man : and kept him, and when he heard him did many things : and he heard him willingly".[1] It is difficult wholly to quench the light of conscience and it would appear that even Herod's career of sin had not utterly destroyed the sense of aspiration after better things. The prophetic words of

[1] Mark vi. 20.

St. John the Baptist came to him as an outward echo of the rebuke whispered unceasingly by the secret voice within.

It was not that he listened to the Baptist as David did to Nathan, when in the strength of his faith the royal penitent confessed his sin and uttered his "Miserere". Herod's faith, if any, was of the feeblest type, and perhaps might better he described as mere superstition. Men that have deliberately surrendered themselves to sin, and blotted out from themselves the face of heaven, often preserve some unreasoning and fantastic impressions of a lost truth or a banished light. In any case, some flickering sense of spiritual things led Herod to "hear willingly" St. John, and "when he heard him to do many things".

But it is evident from St. Matthew that sin and Herodias were too strong for the faint aspiration of the spirit within him, and as the holy Baptist lingered in prison the denunciation of his cherished sin became irksome to Herod, and he yielded to the spell of the stronger character of Herodias, who regarded the Elias of the gospel much as Jezabel of old regarded the prophet of Carmel. Thus St. Matthew, doubtless speaking of a later stage of Herod's feeling toward St. John, says: "Having a mind to put him to death,

he feared the people : because they esteemed him as a prophet".[1] It needed, indeed, the more unrelenting passion and the fiercer hatred of Herodias to compass the Baptist's death in the actual manner in which it was brought about. In the midst of the feast, it is probable that Herod was just as much revolted as his guests at the barbarous demand of Herodias. Nevertheless, the stronger will prevailed, and Herod betrayed the weakness which cannot hold its own against a more resolute spirit, however evil that spirit may be. Unwillingly, and yet willingly, he shed the blood of the Baptist, and the sin of murder followed close upon the footsteps of adultery.

Not long after the death of the Baptist Herod began to hear of our Lord and "sought to see Him".[2] A vague superstitious thought possessed him, that one who wrought such wonders as he heard attributed to Christ could be no other than John risen from the dead. He said : "John the Baptist is risen again from the dead, and therefore mighty works show forth themselves in him".[3] It was not that any feeling of repentance came to him, or any hope that his crime had not altogether deprived the world of a precious life. It was rather a crude, superstitious curiosity, prompting

[1] Matt. xiv. 5. [2] Luke ix. 9. [3] Mark vi. 14.

the desire to see One, who if not the Baptist, was apparently greater than the Baptist.

At a later stage it would appear that Herod entertained more sinister designs against our Lord, with the object, as it seemed, of trapping Him into his jurisdiction and power. The message is given to our Lord by some of the Pharisees.[1] "Depart and get Thee hence, for Herod hath a mind to kill Thee. And He said to them: Go and tell that fox, Behold I cast out devils, and do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I am consummated. Nevertheless, I must walk to-day and to-morrow and the day following, because it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem." It was not decreed in the eternal counsels of God that Herod should be the cause of our Lord's death, as he had been of that of the Baptist. "It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem." Herod's craft is therefore vain, and his designs futile. Nevertheless, it was decreed from the beginning that he too should play his part in the mystery of the Passion, and should add his contribution to the bitterness of the chalice which the Son of Man came to drink.

II. The Feast of the Passover brought many to Jerusalem, and whether as a mere matter of

[1] Luke XIII. 31 *sq.*

political expediency, or from some almost mechanical habit of conformity to the outward usages of religion, Herod also is among the number assembled there. Soon after his arrival the betrayal of our Lord took place : then the charges made against Him before Pilate : then Pilate's dilemma between his sense of justice on the one side, and his fear of the world's vindictive threats on the other : then his attempt to escape responsibility by sending our Lord to Herod, on the plea that a Galilean would be subject to Herod's jurisdiction. Thus unexpectedly by the sequence of events, or rather by a providential design which men unwittingly carried forward to execution, Herod is brought face to face with Christ.

His long-cherished wish is at length satisfied. He can examine for himself whether the Baptist, or Elias, or one of the ancient prophets is risen again ;[1] and if such be the case, he can enjoy the high gratification of listening to a prophet's eloquence, and receiving at first hand a prophet's message. "Herod seeing Jesus was very glad," St. Luke says.[2] Alas! it was not the gladness of a soul fainting for the waters of life and at last finding itself at the fountain head. It was not the delight of the captive seeking freedom and beholding his deliverer. It was not the joy of

[1] Luke ix. 8. [2] Ib. xxiii. 8.

one looking for light and life, and suddenly finding them. It was only the cold, sterile pleasure of one immersed in thoughts of earth, seeking idly to admire some new form of human greatness or excellence, and hoping to find what would satisfy his expectations and meet his intellectual demands.

There was in the world then, as now, a power of appreciating spiritual beauty, or spiritual truth, as mere abstract things, compelling admiration indeed, yet regarded only as objects of interest to the mind and of pleasure to the cultivated taste. Herod, whose mind had been schooled in the culture of his day at Rome, could look upon the exponent of Divine Truth, or of supernatural holiness, as he would upon a mere masterpiece of human art, in reality seeking no more than what the lifeless form coming from the sculptor's hand could tell him. Intellectual curiosity, wide in its range of appreciation, sought pleasure in any type of excellence, loved to hear new thoughts clothed in sublime words, and could pass over what offended for the sake of what refreshed the æsthetic sense.

Moreover, there was the lingering memory of the past supernatural history of that religion which he professed to follow, a history full of signs and wonders, which possibly some one

inheriting the spirit of the ancient prophets might show to the world again. He craved, if such a one arose in his day, to be a witness to his powers. Thus a debased curiosity in the region of the supernatural, without the least desire of seeking the final end of the supernatural, added intensity to his wish to see Christ. "Master, we would see a sign from Thee"[1]—the idle request of the Scribes and Pharisees—sufficiently expressed the mind of Herod in reference to any messenger coming from God to men.

Doubtless the restlessness of a soul uneasy in its spiritual bondage sought some palliative, as men are wont to seek it, in the abstract play of intellect upon the great principles and truths of the supernatural life. On the other hand, all this dealing with the deepest needs of nature, and the inner life of the soul, as though they were things apart from the sphere of present interest and action, abstractions beautiful or fascinating to the intellect, and nothing more: all such trifling with the boon of life-giving Truth, all such play of man's mind with the Divine grace of Faith, it is all a poor, hollow unreality, all too conscious of its own insufficiency when man is confronted with God. It is a product of the world, and of men's subservience to those passions which

[1] Matt. xii. 38.

govern the world. But it is a poor and wretched thing—however great its pretensions—in the sight of God, and cannot fail to bring bitter disillusion to him who has practised it.

When, therefore, our Lord appeared before Herod, and that interview took place which forms one of the great scenes of the Passion, we may take Herod as representing the world's intellectual indifference and pride, its callous sensuality and vice.

III. What is the attitude of Christ towards this type of worldliness and sin? What law of Divine action does our Lord seem to point out and illustrate in His dealings with it? There is, indeed, an emphatic lesson, and an important law of God's action taught us by our Lord in His treatment of Herod. From beginning to end, in spite of every device to unseal His lips, He maintains an inexorable silence.

It was indeed a memorable scene. He who is the essential Truth and Holiness comes "in the bowels of the mercy of God"[1] to visit His own creation, veiling for the moment the splendours of His face, and is placed before the tribunal of the world seeking to cover its corruption under a glittering show of pomp and power. On the one hand, "the chief priests and the

[1] Luke i. 78.

scribes stood by, earnestly accusing Him". Face to face before Him sits Herod with his guard of soldiers, and "he questioned Him in many words. But He answered him nothing."[1] He who is by nature infinite Purity and Wisdom stands confronted with the world's grossest vice and its vainest pretence of superior wisdom. For the moment the glory of the Divine attributes is wholly hidden, and, as in the darkness the glimmer of a taper seems bright, so in the temporary eclipse of the Passion Herod's craft and skill in questioning stand out in contrast with the impenetrable silence and humility of Christ.

But in reality it is the pomp-loving judge, in all his glitter of pride and worldly circumstance that is upon his trial and receives his award. Christ, the real Judge, though He appears as the Accused, leaves unheeded the charges of the chief priests and scribes—He has already dealt with them. Herod's questions, many and subtle, are repeated in vain. All the efforts of the world's shallow craft and ingenuity are exhausted, all its contrivances and pretensions foiled. Nothing can break that inexorable silence, no sound can be drawn from those Divine lips—"He answered him nothing". Herod is judged, even as "the prince of this world is already judged,"[2]

[1] Luke XXIII. 9, 10. [2] John XVI. 11.

and is condemned as unworthy to receive any message or communication from the Son of God. Divine words are not to be so wholly wasted: the pearls of grace are not to be uselessly cast under the feet of swine. To them that persist in loving darkness better than light, the gates of the kingdom of light are at length closed. When, owing to human perversity, the fountain of Truth is sealed up, it is vain for the corrupt heart of man to attempt to violate and open it. Who, indeed, can contend in judgment with God, or what is there except the one only appeal of the humble and contrite heart, which He mercifully allows to be omnipotent with Him, that can make Divine acts to come and Divine words to flow? Herod's heart is far removed from dispositions such as these, and he is therefore doomed to silence on the part of God.

Such is the stern attitude of Christ towards the proud sensuality of the world. Whosoever wishes to hear the voice of God must surely carry in his heart some element of humility, some fibre of earnestness, some desire after the better things. God is marvellously profuse in His gifts both of nature and of grace. They flow forth, like the sunshine and the rain, upon the good and the bad, the worthy and the unworthy. Yet it is possible for man to divert the stream of mercy,

and turn it aside from his own soul. There is an attitude of will towards God that hinders all communication between the Creator and the creature. There is a state of soul which may be said to have imposed silence upon the Word of God. On one great occasion, the violent resistance of self-seeking Pharisees to grace caused the mysterious hiding of the face of Christ, and the withdrawal of His presence from amongst them. "They took up stones therefore to cast at Him. But Jesus hid Himself and went out of the Temple."[1] Wilful opposition to grace drove grace forth from the Temple. Wilful opposition to Truth imposes silence upon Truth : for it is not to be expected that the words of God shall at any time be spoken wholly in vain.

Thus Herod receives the silent and solemn condemnation of Christ. On earth he is doomed never to hear the sound of that Divine voice, whose message he is unwilling to receive. At another tribunal he will indeed hear it, but then a mighty change will have intervened. It will be no longer the voice of one pleading with the souls of men for their acceptance of grace, but the voice of the Judge resounding through heaven and earth in the final sentence of eternal justice. Herod's condemnation to absolute silence on the

[1] John VIII. 59.

part of Christ is the gospel monument of warning and instruction to men, bidding them fear the proud, faithless sensuality of the world, and the more especially when combined with its empty wisdom and pretentious unreality.

The mocking of our Lord that followed, when "Herod and his army set him at nought," is typical of the wicked and futile resentment which the world's baffled pride seeks to express in the form which most flatters itself. It affects to scorn what is too high or holy for it, and will turn itself blindly upon Truth, when the judgment of Truth goes against it. It aims its light, pointed arrow of ridicule with the same malice and the same folly with which it uses the more blunted weapons of cruelty and force. "Sagittæ parvulorum factæ sunt plagæ eorum : et infirmatæ sunt contra eos linguæ eorum."[1] "The arrows of children are their wounds : and their tongues against them are made weak." Poor is the edge and feeble the stroke of the weapons which men fashion against the Truth of God. Weak indeed must ever be the greatest efforts of the created against the uncreated Wisdom. It is the fury of the wavelet breaking itself against the rock. A rude shock and a bitter awakening awaits the

[1] Ps. LXIII. 8.

attempt of the mocking spirit to hurl itself against the great realities of eternal Truth.

Once, indeed, when the foolish minstrels and mourners in the house of Jairus "laughed to scorn" the words of Christ,[1] they were quickly confounded and smitten with fear as they saw the words followed by a mighty deed. But the long-suffering of God does not always so speedily visit upon men the fruit of their folly, and the derision that is sacrilegiously offered to Divine truth is often permitted to wait a long time for its doom. That is due to the Divine attribute of Patience, which stands in such strong and merciful contrast with the haste and impatience of men.

On the part of our Lord, it was one of the great manifestations of His Divinity when He so marvellously exercised that attribute in the course of His Passion before Annas[2] and Herod. Being eternal, God waits His own time to vindicate Himself and "the hidden things of His wisdom".[3] But of all forms of folly, that will surely be made to appear the worst which professes to find unreason in the glory of the Divine Intelligence, and ineptitude in the uncreated Wisdom of God. Herod is the prototype of that mocking spirit that has so often endeavoured under the guise

[1] Matt. IX. 24. [2] John XVIII. 22. [3] Ps. L. 8.

of superior wisdom to resist and belittle the claim of Christian Truth and the authority of Christian Faith. Others in their turn have laughed to scorn mysterious words Divinely spoken, and set at naught the message Divinely sent. To such doubtless the Psalmist's words have their special application: "Qui habitat in cælis subsannabit eos". "He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh at them: and the Lord shall deride them."[1]

As generally happens with men who exchange the worship of God for the worship of the world, Herod found at no distant date that the world itself had turned against him and rejected him. He fell into disgrace at Rome, lost his tetrarchy and ended his days in exile and obscurity. So the world repays its votaries. There is but one true Sovereignty for the soul, and one allegiance which never meets with faulty recognition or changeful abandonment.

"Be not deceived, God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption. But he that soweth in the spirit, of the spirit shall reap life everlasting."[2]

[1] Ps. II. 4. [2] Gal. VI. 7, 8.

X.

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA.

"Post hæc autem rogavit Pilatum Joseph ab Arimathæa (eo quod esset discipulus Jesu, occultus autem propter metum Judæorum), ut tolleret corpus Jesu. Et permisit Pilatus. Venit ergo et tulit corpus Jesu."

"And after these things Joseph of Arimathea (because he was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews) besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus. And Pilate gave leave. He came therefore and took away the body of Jesus."—John xix. 38.

THERE was one small gleam of light in the deep night of the Passion when all the earth was covered with darkness. A thick cloud of despair and fear hung over the minds of Christ's disciples. They had gone to Calvary to see the end of their hopes and the death of their high expectations. The mystic darkness that covered the earth from the sixth to the ninth hour penetrated and held possession of their souls. Fear brought absolute consternation to the sheep once the Shepherd had been struck. All was buried in

the deep gloom that followed upon the sudden setting of the Sun of justice.

Yet from one small rent in the cloud, from one small point in the gloom, a faint light shines out. It is the glimmering of two stars breaking through the darkness, twin companions in a desert sky. Two men hitherto unknown to the disciples of Christ, or at least unacknowledged as sharing fellowship with them in the Kingdom of their Master, suddenly rise above the horizon, and appear to take upon themselves the whole burden of love and duty from which the others have all fled away. They had been hidden when others had been conspicuous to all eyes. They feared, when others humbler and simpler than themselves were full of highest hope. Now, however, when the supreme moment of crisis is come, the power of the cross of Christ to manifest its efficacy as a sign by which "out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed"[1] is shown in the persons of these two secret disciples of Christ, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. The one goes boldly to claim the dead body of Christ, the other openly proclaims himself a disciple whose duty forces him to render the last services of fidelity and devotion to his dead Master. Their forgetfulness of fear and faithful

[1] Luke II. 35.

acceptance of duty to their Master in the day of His desolation is a grateful memory, and, like the act of Mary of Bethany, to be told of them wheresoever the gospel is preached. We may, therefore, examine with profit the lessons they give us.

I. Joseph of Arimathea was rich, "a noble counsellor," according to St. Mark, or member of the Sanhedrin, and as such had possibly taken part in the trial of our Lord. But, as St. Luke says, he "had not consented to their counsel and doings". St. Matthew calls him "a disciple of Jesus," St. Luke "a good and just man, who also himself looked for the Kingdom of God," and St. John says that he was a disciple, "but secretly for fear of the Jews".[1] His goodness and uprightness of heart obtained for him the grace of faith. Amongst the spiritual leaders of the people he stood out in strong contrast to the self-seeking, form-worshipping men of whom St. Stephen said, "uncircumcized in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Ghost".[2] Looking in sincerity of heart for the Kingdom of God, he was led to the knowledge of that Kingdom as revealed in Jesus Christ. "He that doth

[1] Matt. xxvii. 57; Mark xv. 43; Luke xxiii. 50, 51; John xix. 38.

[2] Acts vii. 51.

truth cometh to the light."[1] To our Lord, knowing what was in man, he must have been known as one who had heard and accepted the Word of God. To others, possibly to the Apostles themselves, his faith and discipleship were unknown.

Yet for all that his heart was so pure and upright, his faith remained in its rudimentary stage, held down by human considerations and inactive under the influence of moral fear. St. John tells us : "The Jews had already agreed among themselves that, if any man should confess Him to be Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue".[2] It was due to this spiritual terrorism that the parents of the man born blind feared to say it was our Lord who had cured their son. A little later St. John again says : "Many of the chief men also believed in Him : but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, that they might not be cast out of the synagogue. For they loved the glory of men more than the glory of God."[3] There is a sordid fear, such as is described in these words, which is willing unscrupulously to quench the light of faith rather than forfeit the glory that is of the world. That is the domination of a perverted instinct, which makes more of men than of God, which shrinks

[1] John III. 21. [2] Ib. IX. 22. [3] Ib. XII. 32.

from all thought of sacrifice and is content to end in apostasy. In all ages it has existed, for in all ages worldliness has exercised its tyranny over the better aspirations of men's souls. The fear which is ready to forsake Christ at the bidding of the world is, doubtless, the most sinful and degraded form of disloyalty to God.

But there is a great distinction to be made between the traitorous cowardice of the apostate and the hesitating timidity of the weak disciple. Despite his weakness in outward profession, Joseph of Arimathea cannot be classed with them that "loved the glory of men more than the glory of God"; for St. Luke tells us, "he was a good and just man, who also himself looked for the Kingdom of God". Even a just man may have his weaknesses and limitations. Until it is made perfect by grace, the sincerest faith may have its besetting slowness and timidity, as the disciples themselves made manifest, both in the course of the Passion and in the days immediately following the Resurrection. The "closed doors" through which our Lord passed on the day of the Resurrection, and its following octave, attested the fears which still held down souls whose faith was fully re-established. The timidity of Joseph of Arimathea before the Passion was akin to that of the disciples after the Passion. It was weak-

ness, sinful weakness, no doubt, such as to cripple the spiritual energies of the disciple in the service of his Master. But it was wholly different from the apostate fear of them that "loved the glory of men more than the glory of God".

II. Previously to the Passion and the great event of Calvary, this noble counsellor suffers by contrast with the simple, unlettered disciples who actually became the founders of the Church. While he dreaded to make open profession of his discipleship, they gloried in the outward manifestation of their allegiance. He counted the cost of social and religious ostracism : although to them the sacrifice was not so great, materially regarded, yet such as it was they were ready to make it for the hope that was in them. They were not wholly dismayed even by the warnings of persecution that their Master gave them, and Thomas in the last journey to Jerusalem said, "Let us also go that we may die with Him";[1] just as Peter said, "I am ready to go with Thee both into prison and to death".[2]

The contrast between the laggard fears of the one and the simple readiness of the others in the service of our Lord may be taken, moreover, as illustrating a truth that is too often forgotten. It is not always that the advantages prized by the

[1] John xi. 16. [2] Luke xxii. 33.

world are helpful, from the supernatural point of view, in the promotion of the best interests of men's souls. Wealth, culture, social status, honourable recognition by the world may but too surely cause the heart to strike root into the earth, to get itself fast bound, to discover a multitude of difficulties when there is a high call to some more generous form of action in the service of God.

Men are wont to wish for wealth, and to persuade themselves that their motive is a high one in so wishing. But it is fortunate, indeed, for the great majority that such super-abundance of the prizes of the world is not vouchsafed to them. Our Lord's words describe its common effect on the higher aspirations of grace, when He says of the seed that fell among thorns, "the thorns growing up with it, choked it".[1] It was not without deep meaning that He startled His disciples by the paradox of the rich man finding it more difficult to enter the Kingdom of Heaven than a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.[2]

The timidity and shrinking from outward confession of faith on the part of Joseph of Arimathea was in all likelihood due to the possession of those very advantages which men so recklessly crave after. "I have believed, therefore have I spoken"; "I spoke of Thy testimonies before kings, and I

[1] Luke VIII. 7. [2] Matt. XIX. 24.

was not ashamed"; "I am not ashamed of the gospel;"[1] all this bold profession of faith in the face of the world demands an utter disregard of the world's gifts, a total estrangement of the heart from them, a complete independence of the ties they are wont to produce, when the honour of God is in question and Truth calls for the homage of the voice as well as of the heart. This was the one thing wanting to the faith and devotion of Joseph of Arimathea previously to the events of Calvary.

When, however, the Passion is completed and the sacrifice of the cross is consummated, then all is changed. Just as "the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints that had slept arose,"[2] so amongst the first-fruits of the Cross is to be numbered that immediate raising to life of the dormant faith of this secret disciple. The chosen followers of Christ have hidden themselves away. Most of them, probably, if put to Peter's test would have succumbed to Peter's fear, and would have denied as he denied. Yet such is the virtue of the Cross, that one whom fear had hitherto held fettered and hidden now emerges into life, seeks expression for his faith, is constrained by the mystery of that sublime sacrifice which he

[1] Ps. cxv. 1; Ib. cxviii. 46; Rom. i. 16.

[2] Matt. xxvi. 52.

has seen accomplished, and is impelled onwards to the fuller devotion of that perfect charity which casteth out fear. If the shock of Calvary brought dread and utter desolation to the souls of Christ's chosen ones, to the soul of this secret disciple it brought an irresistible light, an all-constraining activity of devotion, which hastened to redeem past irresponsiveness, and supply in itself whatever might be wanting in others. It was too full of its own all-absorbing sense of duty to take heed of the failure of those from whom a last proof of fidelity might be expected.

While as yet the mystery of the Cross was in course of accomplishment, it wrought its transformation in the soul of the penitent thief. When it was completed, the centurion who knew nothing of our Lord's doctrine, who had not heard Him speak as "never did man speak,"[1] felt its awakening force and went away exclaiming, "Indeed this was the Son of God".[2] St. Luke tells us, "All the multitude of them that were come together to that sight, and saw the things that were done, returned striking their breasts".[3] It was due to the same Divine virtue that went out from the Cross that he, whose faith and devotion had been earth-bound and imperfect, should rise out

[1] John vii. 46. [2] Matt. xxvii. 54.
[3] Luke xxiii. 48.

of his imperfection and seek, though late, even at the eleventh hour of the day, to render due homage to the Master whom he acknowledged and the Divine truth he had received. "Sero Te amavi," the words afterwards spoken by St. Augustine, "All too late have I loved Thee," would doubtless express the inner sense that stirred his heart, as he strove by the fervour of present devotion to repair the tardy failures of the past.

He went "boldly," as St. Mark tells us, "to Pilate, and "begged the body of Jesus".[1] Then having obtained his petition, he proceeded with Nicodemus reverently to unfasten the hands and feet of the Divine Victim, locked as they were to the sacrificial wood, and "taking the body, he wrapped it up in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new monument, which he had hewed out in a rock".[2] It is remarkable, indeed, that the tenderest offices of devotion towards the dead body of the Lamb of God should have fallen to the lot of one who had never made public claim to be a disciple, who could have no claim to be an Apostle of Christ. It is one of the deep mysteries of God's Providence in relation to individual souls, and one of the many wonders connected with the vast economy of the distribu-

[1] Mark xv. 43. [2] Matt. xxvii. 59, 60.

tion of grace. But it is one of the consoling mercies of the cross of Christ, and one of the mighty manifestations of Divine goodness made through it to all, that it draws to itself the hearts of them that were tempted to remain afar off, that it turns their weakness into strength, clothes them with a new spiritual manhood, and transforms them from passive or fitful sympathizers into open disciples and faithful servants of their crucified Lord.

III. But there is a further mystery of Divine mercy in the spiritual awakening of Joseph of Arimathea, which touches the faith of future generations. He becomes unconsciously an important instrument in the Providence of God to attest the great facts which are necessary, as antecedent conditions, to establish the reality of the Resurrection. The Pharisees and chief priests unwittingly discharged the office allotted them in the over-ruling Providence of God, when they obtained from Pilate the guard to secure the inviolability of the sepulchre. "And they departing made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone and setting guards."[1] The inviolability of the tomb of Christ was one of the necessary conditions for the manifestation of the truth of the Resurrection.

[1] Matt. xxvii. 66.

But there was another condition, of equal importance for the security of men's faith in ages to come. It was needed that there should be some official and indisputable attestation of the death of Christ. It was just precisely this important fact that Joseph of Arimathea was destined by Providence to bring to actuality. Pilate, we are told by St. Mark, when asked by Joseph for the body of Jesus, "wondered that he should be already dead, and sending for the centurion, he asked him if he were already dead. And when he had understood it by the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph."[1] The centurion had seen the process of hastening the death of the two thieves. He had also seen the opening of the side of Christ by the soldier's spear, followed by the stream of blood and serum issuing from the wound. He was the one responsible witness needed to establish beyond cavil the fact of the death of Christ. It was the act of Joseph that called forth this official attestation, and accordingly he fulfils not only a duty of love on the part of the disciple towards his Master, but an office of supreme utility in the Providence of God towards the future disciples of the risen Christ.

Oftentimes it happens that the individual man, in yielding himself to the inspirations of grace, is

[1] Mark xv. 44, 45.

only conscious of fulfilling a debt to his own conscience and consulting the interests of his own soul. He knows not the secret purposes of God; and only as a Divine design unfolds itself in the visible operations of grace amongst the souls of men, can he begin to realize that, in the act of duty which he performed, he was ministerially serving a great end, and was instrumentally co-operating in a mighty work of which he had no previous conception. So was it with Joseph of Arimathea in his last act of love and duty to our Lord. So may we, too, ever remember that to be true to our own souls is to be true in the highest and largest sense to the souls of others: to love God and to seek Him is to love men and to serve them: to be loyal to faith and its Divine Author is the surest means of fulfilling the fraternal duty we owe to our neighbour: to follow the inspirations of grace is not only to win salvation for ourselves, but to procure the best spiritual aids for the salvation of others.

XI.

NICODEMUS.

"Venit autem et Nicodemus, qui venerat ad Jesum nocte primum, ferens mixturam myrrhæ et aloës quasi libras centum."

"And Nicodemus also came, he who at the first came to Jesus by night, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight."—John XIX. 39.

I. NICODEMUS, at the time of the Passion, was no newly-won believer in the office and authority of Christ. From the first year of our Lord's public ministry, from the period of the first cleansing of the Temple and the signs that followed it,[1] from the date of that first veiled prophecy of the resurrection of the temple of His body, Nicodemus had known and believed in Him. The story of his coming to Jesus by night, fully given to us by St. John, tells us of the opposition to our Lord amongst the rulers of the people from the beginning, and of the precautions which one holding high office thought it necessary

[1] John II. 23.

to take in opening communication with Him. From our Lord's words to Nicodemus in this first interview, it would appear that he held a position of special authority. "Art thou the master in Israel, and knowest not these things?"[1] He was, like Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, and assisted at those assemblies of the great Council where the attitude of hostility towards Christ on the part of the prevailing majority was determined.

In the first confession of his faith which he made, he spoke of others as well as of himself. "Rabbi, we know that Thou art come a teacher from God; for no man can do these signs which Thou dost, unless God be with him."[2] Though he came alone to our Lord, yet he was not alone in his conviction of our Lord's Divine mission and authority.

He was happy in his fidelity to that first inspiration which led him to approach the light. It was our Lord's method with him, by suddenly declaring the deep mysteries of the Christian revelation, to make him feel the insufficiency of human learning to measure the breadth and depth of things Divine. Without ascending to

[1] It is to be noted that the Greek has the definite article —ὁ διδάσκαλος τοῦ Ἰσραήλ.

[2] John III. 2.

heaven in search of hidden mysteries, there are so many things even on earth that human eye hath not seen nor human ear heard! The spirit of man can only become receptive of any illumination from the Spirit of God by a willing exercise of humility, in acknowledging the limitations which ever beset it. To inspire such humility, to increase the receptivity of a soul brought into communication with God, our Lord abruptly declares to Nicodemus sublime truths, which were wholly above his comprehension.

Though he was a master in Israel, he must humbly confess himself ignorant of mysteries which were to be learnt only from the Spirit of God, or from the Incarnate Word of God. Therefore it is that in the first great lesson of faith which Nicodemus received, the Divine fact of the new birth of the soul of man from the Spirit of God, the saving sacrifice of the Son of God, the infinite love of the Father, even to the giving away of His Son, these deepest mysteries of Christian doctrine were unfolded to him, without any word of human explanation to lessen their difficulty of apprehension, or to soften the intensity of the light flashed upon him. It was our Lord's method so to teach a mind stored with human wisdom as to make it feel its own poverty in relation to that wisdom that is from

above. In other words, He would establish the great principle that humility of heart must ever be the preparatory condition for that wisdom of faith, to which it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God.

Nicodemus came forth from that interview confirmed in his belief in our Lord, keeping in his memory the mysterious words spoken to him, and, like one greater than himself, pondering them in his heart.[1] There was no Pharisaic pride, or learned self-sufficiency in his soul to obscure the spiritual enlightenment he had received. He had no thought of demanding that what was presented to him for belief should come within the range of his own comprehension. He did not shrink from a Divine truth because it contradicted a human prejudice. The truth of God, though so gentle in its condescension to human weakness, is full of imperious authority in its disregard of human pride or human self-assertion. Thus our Lord spoke with Nicodemus in the full exercise of His Divine authority to teach, adducing no argument, any more than when afterwards He announced the mystery of the Eucharist, and the sacramental eating and drinking of His body and blood.[2] By reason of His all-sufficient authority He demanded faith,

[1] Luke II. 19 [2] John VI. 54.

and that faith Nicodemus was fully willing to give Him.

Nevertheless, the words of Divine Wisdom that inspired others to proclaim themselves disciples, even when less fully and intimately taught, did not move Nicodemus to brave all human consequences and openly follow Christ. The courage to make a great sacrifice in the cause of faith, the readiness to make an act of renunciation of things dear to him, such as a public profession would entail, he could not find it in his heart to exercise. He could not utter the words of Peter and his companions, "Behold, we have left all things and have followed Thee".[1] Such complete abandonment of all things for Christ was doubtless the mark of an apostolic vocation, which came neither to Nicodemus nor to any of the masters in Israel.

It was part of the design of Providence, as St. Paul reminds us, in the formation of the Christian Church to use the weak things of the world to confound the strong, "that no flesh should glory in His sight".[2] The long hesitation of Nicodemus, the timid caution with which he hid from the hostile world the faith that was in him, placed him on a lower plane of spiritual dignity than many others greatly inferior, from

[1] Matt. xix. 27. [2] 1 Cor. i. 29.

the purely natural point of view, to himself. They were more single-minded in thought, more simple and direct in heart, and thus went forward to bear away the first honours of the Kingdom of God, whilst the hesitating and unready were left behind arguing with their fears.

II. It is to be noted that the greater part of our Lord's public ministry was spent in Galilee —the Apostles were practically all Galileans. Comparatively little time was spent in Jerusalem itself, and by far the greater and more important doctrines which He taught were promulgated elsewhere. Hence, Nicodemus could only have followed at a distance the development of those doctrines which formed the new revelation, and the accompanying signs and wonders which inaugurated the Kingdom of God. Assuming that the "festival day" mentioned in the fifth chapter of St. John was the Passover,[1] Nicodemus would have seen and heard our Lord once again, a year after his first interview. After that the opposition so grew in intensity that our Lord did not come to Jerusalem for the next Passover. It was about the period of this third Passover of His ministry that He miraculously fed the multitude of five thousand in Galilee, and first announced the institution of the Holy Eucharist.

[1] John v. 1.

Only towards the end of the last year of His ministry did He come again to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles,[1] and again teach in the Temple. Then it was that the officers of the chief priests and rulers received orders to apprehend Him.[2] The men that were sent listened with wonder to His words, the Divine inspiration going out from Him took possession of their minds, and they found it impossible to turn their hands against Him. They returned and said in the midst of the Council, "Never did man speak like this man". Unlike their masters, they were free from the fatal prepossessions of spiritual pride, and the words of grace which they heard found unopposed entrance into their souls. They bore spontaneous witness to the power of Divine truth, but it was a witness bitterly unwelcome to their rulers. "Are you also seduced? This multitude that knoweth not the Law are accursed."[3] Such was the fierce pride of those who had "taken away the key of knowledge,"[4] such their scorn for the multitude whom they were blindly leading to a fall.

It was on this occasion that, for the first time, Nicodemus spoke and gave some faint expression to his secret convictions. "Doth our Law judge

[1] John VII. 2. [2] Ib. VII. 32.
[3] Ib. VII. 47, 49. [4] Luke XI. 52.

any man, unless it first hear him, and know what he doth?"[1] This was but a simple reminder of the first principles of justice, a mild appeal, committing the speaker to no more than a desire for just judgment. But it showed a mind and will which did not harmonize with the prevailing purpose of iniquity in the thoughts of those around him. Evil is quick to suspect whatever contradicts it, or seems, however remotely, to baffle its designs. Hence there came the reproach, passionately hurled at him who spoke of the Law, "Art thou also a Galilean? Search the Scriptures, and see that out of Galilee a prophet riseth not."[2]

It was the first indication of moral courage which Nicodemus gave. It was his first act of public homage to the faith he had received. The shadow of the Cross was already cast upon this last period of the life of Christ: the rulers had decided that He must die.[3] It was part of the mysterious influence of the Cross, that, as it approached, it should move the timid to forget their fear, and the silent to find a voice for their faith. The call of the Cross came to Nicodemus, and the mystery which brought about "the fall and the resurrection of many in Israel, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed," moved

[1] John VII. 51. [2] Ib. VII. 52. [3] Ib. VII. 1.

him to speak and bear his witness to the truth, regardless of his former fear.

As a protest against iniquity, his words were powerless and ineffectual. And yet it is never wholly ineffectual to bear witness to duty and to truth. Such a witness is never wholly lost. It may be overborne by numbers, material force may silence it, it may seem for the moment to be no better than a leaf before the storm, but in the nature of things it is found that it does exert a secret influence, which goes far to lessen or repair the evil which it strives to oppose. At least, it draws together the elements of good which are never wholly wanting amongst men, which are weak in their isolation, but give mutual strength as by a common bond they unite together.

It is probable that the protest of Nicodemus drew together into mutual sympathy and co-operation the few who, like Joseph of Arimathea, thought as he thought. From that hour at least a bond of fellowship in faith united him with Joseph of Arimathea, and both were inspired by the common desire to serve loyally the interests of the Master against whom all the powers of evil were moving.

We are not told what action the two friends publicly took in the later gatherings of the Council which immediately preceded the death of our

Lord. St. Luke, speaking negatively, only says of Joseph, "the same had not consented to their counsel and their doings".[1] They must have manifestly stood apart from the overruling majority which demanded the condemnation of our Lord, and proceeded to intimidate Pilate into a hurried sentence of crucifixion. They were powerless to prevent the final catastrophe, and moreover, in obedience to a higher law, "all things must needs be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets and in the Psalms concerning Me," as our Lord afterwards explained.[2]

The moment of triumph for the powers of evil had come—so was it appointed from the beginning. "This is your hour, and the power of darkness."[3] The mission and life of the Son of God, as if by a sudden elemental upheaval of the latent forces of sin, were brought to nought. Divine love, which had come in search of the hearts of men, was apparently baffled in its great enterprise, and forced to descend to depths of humiliation which seemed almost impossible even to Him whose attributes are infinite.

But in effect it was precisely that mysterious hour which was the turning-point in the whole

[1] Luke xxiii. 51. [2] Ib. xxiv. 44.
[3] Ib. xxii. 53.

history of the souls of men. Immediately, without any admission of delay, the cross began to exercise its mystic power, and to commence the long series of its triumphs. The two secret disciples found in it the inspiration and grace which gave them all that was wanting to their faith. Joseph goes "boldly" to Pilate to ask for the body of Christ. Nicodemus associates himself with him in his public and fearless profession of faith. He assists in the taking down from the cross, and brings to the sepulchre his mixture of myrrh and aloes, "about an hundred pound weight". He, too, serves in the designs of Providence to attest, by his personal devotion and faithful ministrations, the reality of the death of Christ. He fills his appointed place in establishing the conditions necessary to secure the certainty of the Resurrection.

So it falls to the lot of one whose spiritual timidity and slowness of heart to respond to the call of grace had kept him in obscurity, to become a favoured instrument of Divine Providence in the great crisis of the Passion. It is one of the consoling lessons given us, to illustrate the fact that a very abundant blessing may follow even a tardy surrender to grace. The ministry of devotion to the body of our Lord, which came as his allotted privilege to Nicodemus, serves to

point out to us how precious in the sight of God is even a belated offering of man's heart to His service.

In the privilege which fell to the portion of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, we may learn the inspiring truth that for us also, however long we may have delayed, there is a call of grace bidding us arise and take up the burden of duty in the service of God, render our due homage of devotion to the Master who has called us, follow Him whithersoever He leads us, and thereby reap the blessings which are offered to the last, as well as the first, of the disciples of Christ.

XII.

THE MYSTERY OF PLENTEOUS REDEMPTION.

Good Friday.

"Quia apud Dominum misericordia: et copiosa apud Eum redemptio."

"For with the Lord there is mercy: and with Him plenteous Redemption."—Ps. CXXIX. 7.

THE Psalmist's words convey an important truth, which underlies the whole of the great doctrine of the Atonement. It is necessary to bear in mind that God, in His choice of means, was not limited to one exclusive mode of action in freeing man from sin. In the fullness of that freedom which is essential to the will of God, as it is essential to the will of man, He might have granted an absolute pardon of sin, by the exercise of his prerogative of Mercy, without demanding any satisfaction at all.[1] There is no essential

[1] St. Thom., "Summa," tertia pars, q. 46, a. 2, ad 3: "Si voluisset absque omni satisfactione hominem a peccato liberare, contra justitiam non fecisset".

principle of justice which excludes from God, or renders wholly nugatory, such an exercise of His attribute of Mercy.

When the Socinian (or rationalist) difficulty is urged against the doctrine of Redemption, that it violates justice by demanding that the innocent suffer for the guilty, the whole objection rests upon a mistaken supposition. It assumes that an immutable law of justice is asserted, by reason of which God can only pardon sin on the condition that an adequate penalty be paid for it, and that it is a matter of indifference whether this penalty be paid by the guilty or by the innocent. But no such principle is asserted or implied in the Catholic doctrine of the Atonement. No such limitation of the Divine Mercy is admitted. On the contrary, the Incarnation and death of the Son of God are declared to be not so much a work of justice as of abounding love. No essential principle of justice determined the will of God to decree either the mystery of Bethlehem or that of Calvary. The mystery of the Cross was the free appointment by the Father of a Divine act, in which the Son freely took upon Himself, as victim, to offer satisfaction for the sins of men. That is the first significance of the Psalmist's words, "with Him is plenteous redemption". Over and above all that was sufficient, infinitely

surpassing all that was necessary, the love of God devised a means of "plenteous" redemption, which was fitted most fully to reveal Him to men.

Again, it was possible that God should have ordained that, once the mystery of the Incarnation had taken place, the very first act of homage offered to the Father by the Incarnate Word should be accepted as a full expiation of the sins of men. By reason of the Divinity of the Person of Christ, each act of worship offered by Him had in itself an infinite merit.[1] Therefore its satisfactory merit was more than sufficient to expiate all the evil of sin. Hence, the actual death of Christ was by no means the mere execution of a law of justice, or the only possible means of redemption, or demanded by any necessity other than that which was created by the bounteous decree of Divine love, which ordained that thus, and in no other manner, should man be redeemed.

One act of supreme praise, one drop of the Precious Blood, such as was shed in the early mystery of the Circumcision, would have sufficed as the full satisfaction for all the indignity of sin.

[1] "Dicendum quod Christus a principio suæ conceptionis meruit nobis salutem æternam."—"Summa," tertia pars, q. 48, a. 1, ad secundum.

But it pleased Him who sent, and Him who came to save us not to choose to do enough, not to be content with what sufficed, but to ordain rather that which was immeasurably more than enough to accomplish our deliverance. All the difference between what would have sufficed to satisfy Justice, and that which was actually wrought to satisfy Love, is the illuminating truth contained in the Psalmist's words, "with Him is plenteous redemption".

Thus it is that the principle of vicarious sacrifice, whereby one is willing to suffer that another may be saved, finds its pattern and prototype in the love of Christ. From His cross goes forth the inspiration which carries men to the accomplishment of deeds of heroic devotion and disinterested love in behalf of their brethren. All that is best and highest in human nature is drawn forth from it and perfected under the influence of the Cross. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to Myself."[1] All the countless acts of pure self-sacrifice that relieve the sorrow and bitterness of life, and save it from a moral chaos of conflicting self-interests, are the fruits of the Cross and the happy result of its Divine inspiration.

The mystery of Redemption, therefore, must

[1] John xii. 32.

ever hold the central and primary place amongst all the great truths of Christian faith. It is the one Divine fact from which all things radiate, towards which all things return. It is, in a word, the supreme revelation of God to men, by which He will have them for ever to know Him. In the rude immaturity of man's spiritual development, the first revelation was given to inspire him with fear, and so deter him from evil. But in the final revelation that is made from the Cross, the law of bondage in fear is brought to an end, and the law of love promulgated with such a fullness and solemnity of sacrifice as could never have entered into the hearts of men to conceive. The first purpose, then, of the revelation from the Cross, as St. Thomas points out,[1] is to teach men how infinite is the love of God. Its first practical object is to call forth that which love by its very nature is moved to seek, a return in kind from him who receives it.

[1] "Summa," tertia pars, q. 46, a. 3 : " Per hoc autem quod homo per Christi passionem est liberatus, multa concurrerunt ad salutem hominis pertinentia, præter liberationem a peccato. Primo enim per hoc homo cognoscit quantum Deus hominem diligat, et per hoc provocatur ad Eum diligendum, in quo perfectio humanæ salutis consistit : unde apostolus dicit (Rom. v. 8) : ' Commendat suam charitatem Deus in nobis : quoniam cum inimici essemus, Christus pro nobis mortuus est '."

I. Let us approach to the foot of the Cross that we may endeavour at our soul's leisure, and to the exclusion of other thoughts, to take in more fully this first great lesson. "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends."[1] Here, indeed, is given to us the solemn manifestation of a Divine attribute in a manner which goes beyond all that any reverent mind could have imagined. Here is the final word spoken on the part of God, the final communication made by the Creator to the heart of the creature, He "who at sundry times and in divers manners, spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all, in these days hath spoken to us by His Son".[2] It is the mission and office of the Son to give adequate expression to the Father's love, as well as to His own. That expression of the love of the adorable Trinity is found in the mystery of the Cross.

Signs and wonders had been wrought in the past to attest the desire of God to be known and loved by the children of men. Some of those signs, indeed, plainly prefigured the Cross, in their relation to the actual needs of the chosen people.[3] But beyond all previous mysteries of Divine

[1] John xv. 13. [2] Heb. i. 1, 2.

[3] "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up."—John iii. 14.

Power, or Justice, or Mercy; beyond all the wonders of Horeb and Sinai; beyond even the touching mystery of Bethlehem, where the limit of love on the part of God towards men seemed to have been reached; greatly surpassing all these wonders comes to us the revelation of love which the Eternal Word makes to all without exception from the Cross.

As St. Paul points out, it would have been in some degree a lesser marvel had all those for whom He died been entitled to the name of "friends". But the mystery deepens when we realize that the proof of love is given and the sacrifice made in behalf of those whose own sense of truth must rather represent them as enemies, or false disciples, who play over again the part of Pilate, or Caiphas, or Herod, or Judas. "Scarce for a just man will one die: yet perhaps for a good man some one would dare to die. But God commendeth His charity towards us, because when as yet we were sinners, according to the time, Christ died for us."[1] He has had no regard to man's unworthiness or ingratitude, to his persistent opposition against Him and all His merciful designs. The object of the Cross seems to be that He may break down all possible opposition on the part of man's will, that He may

[1] Rom. v. 7, 8, 9.

so speak to man's heart by the full revelation of His own love as that no human heart with a capacity for love shall be able to withstand or resist Him.

Accordingly, He uses the words, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to Myself". He chooses to give such testimony, to set before the eyes of men a spectacle so surpassing all reach of imagination or thought, to place before them so Divine a picture of the love that is eternal, as that it shall be impossible for them not to make response to it. It is the final appeal and challenge of God to man.

But there is a further principle to be considered, by reason of the intimate relation of the Cross to each individual soul. St. Paul has the words, "Dilexit me, et tradidit semetipsum pro me"— "He loved me, and delivered Himself up for me".[1] The Apostle speaks as though he stood alone in his relation of indebtedness to the Cross; as though all had been wrought with a definite view to his individual benefit. His words contain a deep truth, which sets before us an aspect of Divine love, forcibly distinguishing it from that finite love of which we have experience. It is found with men that according as their affections or sympathies are spread over a wider field, they

[1] Gal. II. 20.

lose in intensity that which they gain in extent. In the exercise of their natural powers, extension and intensity are never equal. They can love a multitude of objects only with a sort of indistinct and collective love. They cannot know and love each unit in a great mass, as though it alone existed. From the limitations that beset our human faculties, any great multiplicity of objects blurs all individual relations, until they become dimmed and enfeebled.

But it is wholly otherwise with the love that is infinite. It is not with a mere general and collective love that God loves the souls of men. As He does not see them confusedly in the mass, but each unit with the same distinctness as though it stood alone, so is it with His love. His attributes suffer no limitations. They do not lose in the intensity of their relation to the individual by the vastness of their extension. Numbers do not weaken, multiplicity cannot enfeeble the perfection with which the love of God seeks and pours itself out upon each individual soul. The nature and intensity of that individual love with which God loves us are partly described in the parable of the solitary lost sheep, which could not be left by its Master to perish, though it was but one out of a hundred.

Thus it follows, as St. Paul points out in the

words, "He loved me, and delivered Himself up for me," the love that speaks from the Cross does not speak to men merely in general, to the great countless multitude, but to each one in the solitary individuality of his own soul. The revelation of the Cross comes to each as though he stood alone in the universe. The voice of the blood "that speaketh better than the blood of Abel"[1] makes its appeal not only to heaven, but to each soul that is making its pilgrimage on earth.

Hence it is that as a consequence of this aspect of God's love we are each one bound to say with St. Paul: "The whole of the stupendous mystery of the Cross, with all its overwhelming revelation of the love of God to man, is wrought for me. It is as fully directed to draw a response from my heart and soul as though no other human being existed, and I were the solitary object of the great sacrifice. At the worst of my unworthiness, I am that lost sheep which a Divine Shepherd has come to seek and to save. The 'everlasting love' of which the prophet speaks —'I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee'[2] —is the gift offered from the Cross for my willing acceptance. It speaks to me through the

[1] Heb. xii. 24. [2] Jer. xxxi. 3.

open mouth of each of the five sacred wounds. It calls, with a vivifying power, to my dead soul to awaken to a new sense and a new life of gratitude and recognition of the one and only supreme claim that can be made upon me."

Certainly there can be no peace to the soul that will remain passive and irresponsive to such a Divine message, or that is content to allow all the gracious activity of love to remain one-sided. It is not possible, without doing violence to our own nature, to resist the Divine magnetism of the cross of Christ. Let us therefore allow ourselves to be drawn by it willingly and gratefully to God. May it communicate to us the new spirit of generous self-devotion, the new principle of self-sacrifice which it introduces into the world.

II. There is a second great truth set before us not less clearly in the revelation that is made from the cross. St. Thomas points out that the cross is intended to deepen our sense of sin, to give us a measure with which to estimate its evil, and consequently to stand as a forbidding barrier between sin and us.[1] It shows us, as nothing else could do,

[1] "Summa," tertia pars, q. 46, a. 3: "Quarto, quia per hoc est homini inducta major necessitas se immunem a peccato conservandi, qui se sanguine Christi redemptum cogitat a peccato secundum illud. (1 Cor. VI. 20), 'Empti enim estis pretio magno; glorificate et portate Deum in corpore vestro'."

what sin is in the sight of God. Let us recall the principle already stated, that any one act of homage offered by the Word made flesh to His eternal Father, or any one drop of His Precious Blood, would have been sufficient to expiate all sin. As St. Thomas's hymn expresses it :—

> Cujus una stilla salvum facere
> Totum mundum quit ab omni scelere.
>
> One single drop of which, for sinners spilt,
> Can cleanse the entire world from all its guilt.

Yet we find that the Wisdom of God, in determining the form and manner of Redemption, decrees that every possible accumulation of suffering and humiliation shall be added together into one vast whole, in order to make the cross serve as an object-lesson of what sin is in His sight. The severity of Divine Justice in the decree of eternal punishment for the unrepentant sinner appears to us as one of the deep mysteries of faith. Yet it is surely true to say that the decree whereby God spared not His only Son, the Divine judgment which appointed the cross, is a greater and more incomprehensible mystery of Divine retribution than that which created hell. The one concerns a penalty to be paid by a guilty creature. The other sets before us the Divine majesty of the Son of God transformed into a victim, willingly laden with all the burden of the world's sin,

and offering a penal sacrifice such as nothing but infinite love could undertake to pay. "Abyssus abyssum invocat"—"Deep calleth unto deep"[1]—the Psalmist sings. It may be said that the mystery of the cross makes answer to the questions raised by the mystery of eternal punishment, and establishes the truth that, whatever cloud of obscurity may at any point appear to hang over it, God is Love. All the while the great fact remains and stands clearly before us that, whereas infinitely less would have sufficed as the price of our redemption, it pleased Him, "in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,"[2] to determine that this "great price"[3] should actually be paid, and that at no less a cost should we be redeemed.

According to the thought of the hymn "Vexilla regis," the cross is the balance on which the body of the Divine Victim is weighed against sin and hell, and wins from hell its prey:—

> Statera facta corporis
> Tulitque prædam tartari.
>
> Thrice blest upon Whose arms outstretched
> The Saviour of the world reclined.
> Balance sublime! upon whose beam
> Was weighed the ransom of mankind.

It gives us in a word, by the magnitude of the

[1] Ps. xli. 8. [2] Col. ii. 3. [3] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

price that was paid, the scale and measure by which God would have us estimate the evil of sin.

As we examine the series of events which make up the Passion of our Lord, we cannot fail to notice how circumstance is added to circumstance with a view of imparting all possible weight and intensity to His sacrificial expiation. Preceding the physical suffering which accompanied the slaying of the Divine Victim, there was the mystery of Gethsemane, in which the soul of Christ sounded all the depth of human sorrow, and by anticipation endured all the actual pains of the Passion, the blood-sweat marking His mental agony. It was doubtless an intensified form of all the subsequent suffering. Then there was the night of ignominy in the court of the High Priest, when He was the sport of men's unrestrained cruelty, buffeted and blindfolded, spit upon and blasphemed. Then came the savage penalty of scourging, Pilate's concession to clamour and device to allay the thirst for His blood. Then followed the barbarous interlude, as it may be called, invented for the moment by the guard of soldiers, unauthorized by anyone, whether Governor or High Priest, in which the band of semi-barbarous legionaries wove a crown of thorns, and pressed it down upon His head, putting in His hand a reed for sceptre

and savagely playing with Him as a mock king. This was no part either of the demands of His enemies or of the sentence of Pilate. It had scarcely found a place in prophecy, and is one of those mysterious additions to the Passion of our Lord appointed in the Providence of God to enlarge and intensify it, and to convey to us the lesson we need to learn as to the nature and effect of our guilt. Then came the carrying of the cross, and the marking out of that new way, by sacrifice to the Kingdom of God. Then followed all the details of the crucifixion, to accomplish every minute prediction of the prophets, and to consummate all that from the beginning had been ordained in the counsels of God. But in every step that is taken, in every added circumstance that accompanies the progress of this Divine sacrifice, the judgment of God is made clear to us, pointing out with a Divine force how grievous and bitter is the evil which demands such a remedy as this.

Again, it is not sufficient to regard the cross as delivering an indeterminate and impersonal message to men in general. It makes its revelation to each separate soul, in all the singleness of that soul's life and history. The vision of sin which oppressed the heart of Jesus in Gethsemane and broke it upon the cross was not a

mere dark, impenetrable cloud of collective human wickedness. It was rather a host of individual acts of sin, a multitude of different forms of outrage against the eternal love of God, countless according to the reckoning of men, yet very distinct in the clear vision of Him who looked out upon the world from the cross.

"He knew what was in man," and the knowledge, moreover, was definite and personal. Once He wrote upon the ground, and showed the accusers of a sinful woman that their own sins were not hidden from Him. At the Last Supper He told Judas of his secret thought and his future crime. To Peter, full of confidence in the strength of his own devotion, He foretold his coming fall. "Even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny Me thrice."[1]

Doubtless with similar clearness He saw, and could have foretold, the falls and relapses which make up our spiritual history. None of our personal sins were hidden from Him in the bitterness of His agony. We may make the Psalmist's words our own, "To Thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before Thee, that Thou mayest be justified in Thy words".[2] For to us, as much as to Peter, there exists a special personal relation to the cross. We have added to its

[1] Mark xiv. 30. [2] Ps. l. 6.

sorrows, and by our own deliberate action contributed a special portion of bitterness to the cup there emptied. Hence the cross delivers to us individually a personal message and a personal revelation.

It exposes to us, in a light similar to that which will one day stream forth from the Divine judgment-seat, the nature and effect of our personal sin. It warns us to weigh in the balance chosen by God, not in the false measures of men,[1] the gravity of all the wilful sin by which we have offended. It appeals to us to put an end to the unnatural antagonism between the disciple and the Master, to cease to be in effect "enemies of the cross of Christ".[2] It calls us to humble ourselves in penitential acknowledgment of all our past unfaithfulness, of our weak inconstancy, of our many wilful offences; and in the full determination of our souls to give a truer service, to offer a truer love to Him who has so infinite a claim upon us.

There comes to us, in a word, on this solemn day a Divine communication, more wonderful in all its bearings than the great revelation given to Moses at the burning bush. It is as though a voice from the cross calls us by name, and

[1] Ps. LXI. 10: "Mendaces filii hominum in stateris".

[2] Phil. III. 18.

bids us approach and contemplate "this great sight".[1] Beneath the uplifted cross we stand indeed upon holy ground. There is granted to us the solemn ratification of a Divine promise, the assurance that with a mighty hand and with outstretched arm our deliverance has been effected. The ancient bondage is broken, the long tyranny ended. Sin and its empire are overthrown. But that outstretched arm would gather to-day the children of men into its embrace, and invite them once more to enter into a covenant of love with Him who has come from afar to seek them. May there be none to refuse that invitation, or harden their hearts against the grace.

[1] Ex. III. 3.

XIII.

THE RESURRECTION.

Easter Sunday.

"Hæc est dies quam fecit Dominus: exultemus et lætemur in ea."

"This is the day which the Lord hath made: let us be glad and rejoice therein."— Ps. CXVII. 24.

THE tender mercies of the Lord are above all His works,[1] and wonderful as is the omnipotence of God in the mystery of creation, still more wonderful is the revelation of His Mercy in the mystery of Redemption. The fixed day of rest, which regulated the worship of God in the first dispensation, was the Sabbath of commemoration calling men's thoughts to God as Creator. On that day God was said to have completed His work— "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made, and He blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He had rested from all His work".[2] Just as in the old order of

[1] Ps. CXLIV. 9. [2] Gen. II. 2, 3.

things the day on which God "ended His work" was said to be blessed and sanctified, so is it in that new order of things following upon the Divine work of Redemption. The day on which the Son of God rose from the dead was that in which He completed the work of Redemption.

On the cross He had overcome sin, and blotted out the handwriting of the decree that was against us. But on the morning of the Resurrection He overcame death, the penal consequence of sin, and thus finished the work He came from heaven to accomplish. In that day of His triumph the mystery of Redemption, awaited from the very morrow of creation, was completed, and the first day of the week therefore brings to the world a higher message than even the Sabbath of creation. Thus it is that a new dispensation enters into possession on "this day which the Lord hath made". It is essentially the Lord's Day; it regulates all the thoughts which must henceforth enter into the worship of God, it imparts to the service of God the dominant note of joyousness, by reason of all the hopes it contains and the assurance which it brings.

Marked as with a crown set upon the Divine work of Redemption, the first day of the week is a day of Christian joy as well as of Christian worship, and has carried its tradition with it from

the first age of the Church. "*This* is the day which the Lord hath made: let us be glad and rejoice therein." For the same reason it is that many of the strict observances of the Mosaic Sabbath do not apply to the Christian Sunday. It has about it the larger spirit of a new dispensation, such as is befitting to those who have received "the adoption of sons," who are no longer mere "servants" but "sons".[1] It is binding upon the conscience and the heart with even a higher obligation than the Sabbath of old, because of the higher mysteries which it recalls, and the more wonderful revelation of Divine attributes which it commemorates. But it is part of that law of Christian liberty which is written upon the heart, and which in its details is left to be interpreted by the Apostolic tradition of the Church.

Amongst the cycle of festival days commemorating the great mysteries of faith which make up the Christian year, the feast of the Resurrection holds the chief and central place. Other feasts in the Church's calendar are either preparatory steps leading to it, or point to some of the great consequences, proximate or remote, that follow from it. In the liturgical system of the Church, which seeks to bring down to earth a reflex of

[1] Gal. v. 5, 7.

the worship offered to the Lamb in heaven,[1] the celebration of the day of the Resurrection is the most solemn of all the observances that make up the ecclesiastical year, and the one day on which the Church permits none of her children to be absent from her sacramental table.

I. The mystery of the Resurrection, as has been said, was the triumphant consummation of the work of the Incarnate Word on earth. It was the supreme manifestation of Divine Power on the part of Christ, and the one sufficient evidence appointed by Him to attest His Divine authority and mission. When the incredulous Pharisees demanded a sign, this was the one chosen for them and others. "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh a sign; and a sign shall not be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was in the whale's belly three days and three nights, so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights."[2] He had from the beginning spoken of it as the self-chosen evidence of His Divine authority to them that questioned Him. "The Jews therefore answered and said to Him: what sign dost Thou show unto us, seeing Thou

[1] Apoc. v., vii., and viii. See also St. Justin Martyr, "Apol.," i. 66.

[2] Matt. xii. 39, 40.

dost these things? Jesus answered and said to them: Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews then said: Six and forty years was this temple in building, and wilt Thou raise it up in three days? But He spoke of the temple of His body."[1]

When the chief priests and scribes called out to Him on the cross, "If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him,"[2] they demanded a sign that would have been to Him, comparatively speaking, a small thing to accomplish. It would have been easy for Him, had He so chosen, to detach Himself from the cross, and, as Samson of old, break the bonds which tied Him. Once at Nazareth He withdrew Himself from the hands that strove to precipitate Him from the brow of the hill, and passed unseen through the midst of His enemies. At another time when they sought to stone Him in the court of the Temple, He suddenly withdrew Himself from their power and passed out of the Temple. His hour had not yet come. But when the time of the predestined sacrifice had arrived—"for this cause I came unto this hour,"[3] He could not and would not frustrate His own purpose.

[1] John II. 18 *seq.* [2] Matt. XXVII. 42.
[3] John XII. 27.

There were other bonds far more potent than those of the cross. It was His will to choose that mightier sign, to burst the bonds of death, and give to the world a more worthy proof of Divine Omnipotence. "I lay down My life that I may take it up again; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again."[1] In a word, the Sun of righteousness sank only to rise again.

II. The various circumstances attending it add to the glory of that sign which had been chosen for the enlightenment of men. By a Divine anticipation of the questionings of the human heart, all the essential circumstances preceding or following the Resurrection contain in themselves an answer to the thoughts, or doubts, most likely to disturb the tranquillity of Christian faith.

Thus a question might obviously arise as to the reality of Christ's death on the cross—indeed at certain periods it was the chief question raised to suggest doubt as to the fact of the Resurrection. But the circumstances which bring into prominence Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus forestall any such doubt, and answer any such question. Pilate is induced, by the request made for Christ's body, to ask for an assurance of His

[1] John x. 17, 18.

death, and receives an official attestation of the fact from the centurion, who had been charged with the duty of carrying out the death-sentence. It was not merely the circumstance that the chief priests and rulers were too unlikely to leave their purpose unfulfilled, or that the piercing of the side was a sufficient precaution against any lingering continuance of life, or that Nicodemus's hundred pounds' weight of myrrh and aloes could scarcely have covered a living body. Over and above all these things it was decreed by a far-reaching Providence that Pilate should demand an official declaration certifying the fact of death, and should receive it from the one authoritative witness whose word was beyond question in the matter.

Again, the circumstance that the rulers and priests feared the violation of the sepulchre brought it about that a military guard was placed, and an official seal set upon the sepulchre. It was precisely such precautions for the inviolability of the sepulchre that were likely to be desired, as much by future disciples as by existing enemies. The opening of the sepulchre by any human means was sufficiently guarded against. The efforts of men to frustrate the supernatural, or to outwit the supreme Wisdom of God, ended only in the confusion which awaits all such en-

deavours. There remained only the poor human subterfuge of supporting a hasty invention by a story of "sleeping witnesses"—the feeble device with which the perversity of men sought to resist the truth of God.

Again, there is the strange indubitable fact of the inexpectancy, the slowness of heart and general incredulity on the part of all the disciples. No men could be less prepared in mind than they to believe that Christ had returned from the dead. They rejected the accounts of the women, they refused to be guided by any vision of angels, they distrusted their own senses. When Christ stood in the midst of them, "they being troubled and frightened, supposed they saw a spirit".[1] He was obliged to say to them, "Handle and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as you see Me to have".[2] They were slowly convinced by what they saw and felt and handled. But one Apostle was not present on that occasion. He would accept no one else's witness. He would take nothing on trust, or on the word of others, or on the faith of Christ's own promise. Moreover, he lays down conditions selected as by one who feared deception from trusting to one sense alone. He must feel with his hands, he must probe into the very hollow of the wounds made

[1] Luke xxiv. 37. [2] Luke xxiv. 39.

by the nails and the spear. Only after such careful examination will he promise to believe. The Apostle's conditions are granted, he is invited to examine for himself even as he had proposed. When he has satisfied his heart's desire, and is overwhelmed by the reality of his Master's presence and Divine condescension, he breaks forth into the adoring words, "My Lord and my God".

But the curing of the incredulity of St. Thomas was not merely a merciful dispensation of Providence affecting one individual soul. It was a dispensation equally intended for all such minds as that Apostle typified. St. Gregory's words are well known. "Of greater service to our faith was the unbelief of Thomas than the faith of the believing disciples. For as he by feeling with his hands is brought back to faith, so doth he lead our minds to dismiss all doubt, and become solidly established in faith."[1] An intense propensity to doubt is permitted to possess the mind of an Apostle, that he may serve in his own person to find for other minds, constituted like himself, a Divine answer to any thoughts

[1] "Hom." xxvi. in evangel: "Plus enim nobis Thomæ infidelitas ad fidem, quam fides credentium discipulorum profuit: quia dum ille ad fidem palpando reducitur, nostra mens, omni dubitatione postposita, in fide solidatur".

which might come to them as they had come to him. Thus are the various circumstances attending the Resurrection so disposed by the Providence of God, that they may serve to dissipate any such cloud of obscurity as would dim the glory of the triumph of Christ.

III. When, therefore, He came back as a conqueror to the world which had witnessed His humiliation, Christ brought with Him the spoils of a double victory. He had conquered death as well as sin. A deep cloud had always hung over human life. At its moments of serenest joy there was ever resting upon it the shadow of death, the dread of losing all that entered into the affections, or entwined itself about the heart. The rude severance of every tie, the destruction of every bond of human love, the surrender to the despotism of the grave of all that is sweetest in life, the naked entering into an unknown world, all tended to make the day of final parting one of gloom and desolation. No traveller had been permitted to return and tell his brethren upon earth of his experience in that unseen place whither they were hastening. It was reserved, in truth, for the Lord of life and death to make that return and disclose those secrets.

He came back to teach that men need not fear death as they had done. They need not

shrink from its very mention as though it were a perpetual night, burying all things in oblivion, or leading only to some shadowy form of life which was but an imperfect continuance of that of earth. Death opens the gate to a new and richer and more perfect life than any which is now known to us. It is a birth into an existence far higher and more satisfying than the life we now live. The present bears to that which awaits us the same relation as the dusk of twilight to the glory of noon.[1] It is the near approach to the very fountain of life, where imperfection and disappointment and unsatisfied desire do not exist. It is what God reserves of His best when the day is done and its labours are over. It is, in a word, beyond our present power of conception, for "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him".[2]

Nothing is there lost. Even the body, which seems to perish, is but resting from its toil, until the voice of Him who made it awakens it once more to share the immortality of the soul. At the outset of creation the body was not intended to perish, or become the victim of a painful dissolution. Its destruction is the penal effect of sin. But if the cause be removed, it is to be

[1] 1 Cor. xiii. 12. [2] 1 Cor. ii. 9.

expected that the effect will follow it in its removal. So it is that the mystery of Redemption, completed in the Resurrection of Christ, brings its message of hope and immortality, the restoration of a lost heritage, even to that which is doomed to a temporary corruption. "He will reform the body of our lowness, made like to the body of His glory, according to the operation whereby also He is able to subdue all things unto Himself."[1] It will be called from its long unconsciousness to put on new attributes, to be clothed with a new beauty. It must have its share in the fruits of the plenteous redemption wrought for the whole being of man. It is, in fact, an integral part of that human nature which, in the Incarnation, was wedded to the Divine; when, as the Fathers interpret the words, "the king made a marriage for His Son".[2]

The body, as well as the soul, assumes a new dignity from the mystery of the Incarnation. Hence it is not to be excluded from that redemption wrought through the body of Christ, and the vivifying power of His Resurrection. St. Paul speaks of it as anxiously awaiting its day of redemption. "Even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption of the sons of God, the redemption of our body."[3]

[1] Phil. III. 21. [2] Matt. XXII. 2. [3] Rom. VIII. 23.

It has had its part allotted to it in the performance of the task for which life is given. It has been the willing instrument of the soul's high purpose in accomplishing deeds of devotedness in the service of God ; as with the Saints, spending itself and being spent for Him. Or, as with the martyrs, it has offered itself as a holocaust for His sake, in witness of the faith and love that are stronger than death. Or, as with the multitude of those who form the Communion of Saints, it has borne with the soul the yoke of Christ and carried His burden, humbly and at a distance, according to its capacity, following in His steps. It has neither sought nor received any earthly return, but looked only for that " Crown of justice which the Lord, the just judge, will render in that day ".[1]

It has been the receptacle, too, of Divine graces which through its medium have reached the soul. The Holy Spirit has inhabited it as a living temple, the Son of God has, in all the majesty of His Divinity and in all the fullness of His sacred humanity entered it and sanctified it. It has been, despite its lowliness, and though it is " but dust and ashes," a sacred vessel containing all that is most precious amongst the gifts of God. Hence its high destiny in the promises of God,

[1] 2 Tim. iv. 8.

and its title to share with the soul the hundredfold return which God makes to all that serve Him. "It is sown in corruption, it shall rise in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour, it shall rise in glory. It is sown in weakness, it shall rise in power. It is sown a natural body, it shall rise a spiritual body."[1]

It follows, as a practical consequence from the doctrine of the Resurrection, that the body which is heir to such Divine promises has a sacred dignity and a high ministry in the service of God. It claims our reverent use of the senses which belong to it. It must not be put to ignoble purposes. It must not be handed over to the servitude of sin, or permitted to degrade itself in noxious gratification of its own lower instincts. It is an instrument designed to act in harmony with the rest of creation for the promotion of the glory of God, and of those eternal interests which we carry with us.

If it suffers with Christ, it is destined to be glorified with Him. If it is planted together with Him in the likeness of His death, it shall also be in the likeness of His Resurrection.[2] It is an essentially Christian duty to cherish it as something holy, to keep it from the taint of evil and the breath of corruption, to use it so that we

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 42-4. [2] Rom. vi. 5.

can be said, as the Apostle warns us, to "glorify and bear God in our body".[1] Its "members are the temple of the Holy Ghost," and, like that holier temple of which Christ spoke, if it be for a time destroyed, yet will it in due season be raised up again in a more glorious form than before, to a life that can never be taken away from it.

IV. Lastly, there is an immediate message and a direct call which Christ, rising from the dead, addresses to us. It is a command to rise spiritually and at this present time with Him. It is a call to enter with Him into a new and more perfect and more worthy spiritual life. It is an invitation to leave our old, inconstant, half-hearted self behind us, and awaken to a life of more real intensity and earnestness in the service of God. "If you be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth."[2]

The life of the Resurrection in heaven is to be commenced by faith and hope and love here on earth. Thought and desire and affection must centre on those greater objects which are set before them in that world of the risen Christ. On the other hand, all that keeps us back from the grace that is offered us, and deprives us of the

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 20. [2] Col. iii. 12.

spiritual birthright that is given us, all wilful sin must be buried in the sepulchre of a full renunciation. "We are buried together with Him by baptism unto death; that as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life."[1]

Let us have no fear that He cannot accomplish in us all that He desires. He wills our sanctification, and His grace is able to accomplish it. We need only to unite our will to His, and there is forthwith opened within us a secret source of strength communicating itself to our feebleness, and enabling us to work out our high destiny. In this day which the Lord hath made fear of self must give place to hope in God; for what was spoken of the body is still more true of the soul—"I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in Me, although he be dead, shall live: and every one that liveth and believeth in Me shall not die for ever."[2]

[1] Rom. vi. 4. [2] John xi. 25.

XIV.

THE GREAT SUPPER.

A Homily.

"Homo quidam fecit cænam magnam et vocavit multos."

"A certain man made a great supper and invited many." —Luke xiv. 16.

The parable of the great supper which our Lord spoke in the house of one of the chief of the Pharisees, who had invited Him to "eat bread" with him on the Sabbath day, was primarily addressed to the Pharisees, and treated of the Divine call given them, which they for the most part so foolishly rejected. They were the recipients of a Divine invitation to enter into the Kingdom of God, to accept the gift of faith, to form the beginning of that "Church of the first-born who are written in the heavens," to "eat bread in the Kingdom of God";[1] but they set themselves to find all manner of excuses for

[1] Luke xiv. 15; Heb. xii. 23.

rejecting the invitation. Yet the grace which they refused innumerable others would accept. The empty places of the absent guests would just as much be filled as would the empty thrones of fallen angels. The Kingdom of God would suffer no diminution, the Church of God no loss, for any that might choose to reject it, however many or great they might seem to themselves to be.

But there is a secondary sense which the words of our Lord seem more forcibly to suggest. "A certain man made a great supper and invited many." Surely they recall the scene that was presented in that "large dining-room furnished" when "the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread, and giving thanks, broke, and said, Take ye and eat; this is My body which shall be delivered for you: this do for the commemoration of Me".[1] It is impossible not to see in the institution of the Divine Sacrament of the Eucharist, and in its history through the many generations of men that have been called to partake of it, the most adequate realization of our Lord's words in the parable of the great supper. A vast design of infinite love, seeking acceptance from men with the patience of which only love is capable, stands contrasted with the

[1] Cor. xi. 23, 24.

strange insensibility of those for whose welfare that design was first conceived ; Divine bounty in its self-humiliating condescension on the one hand ; and on the other, human failure either to make return for, or evince any appreciation of, the priceless boon that is offered. Yet as in the parable, Divine generosity triumphs. For if the more favoured amongst men, whose heritage of greater light or whose possession of greater gifts would seem to mark them as the more fitting guests, if these should fail to respond to the invitation given them, then others should come from the east and the west, lowlier souls indeed, yet humbly responsive to the Divine call and sit down at that royal table to eat of the bread and partake of the supper of the King. "Esurientes implevit bonis, et divites dimisit inanes"—"He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away".[1]

I. "A certain man made a great supper." If the "greatness" of that supper is considered, it is plainly God's highest gift to men. Whereas in the Incarnation He gave Himself to men in general, here by an endless multiplication of the gift, He communicates Himself to each one individually amongst all the multitudes of the children of men. No organ of sense perceives Him ; yet

[1] Luke i. 53.

He is present within the outward sign of the Sacrament, with as real and true and living a presence as that in which He sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven. However many may come to receive Him, He communicates Himself to each with the same fullness as though there were none other to partake of His gift. To each recipient is given His body and His blood, His soul and His Divinity—for He will impart life to men by no less a means than by imparting Himself to them. Doubtless it is a mystery full of wonders, full of perplexities to our narrow reason. It transcends all the anticipations that men could ever form of the action of God in the manifestation of His love to His creatures. On the memorable occasion when the first announcement of the great gift was made, it appeared to be too severe a test to the half-formed faith of some faltering disciples. "This saying is hard, and who can hear it?" they said, and accordingly "went back and walked no more with Him".[1] Doubtless also to minds that still persist in measuring things Divine by things that are human, its conception is impossible; for the vastness of the love revealed in it can only proceed from a Divine nature, or, if we may so speak, from a Divine heart.

[1] John vi. 61, 67.

If it is looked at in itself, and apart from other mysteries of Divine condescension to man's wants and weaknesses, it may easily bewilder the limited minds and hearts of men. But it cannot be taken alone, or regarded separately from other great works of God with which it is essentially connected. It is a sublime mystery indeed of Divine love and power. But it is, as it were, the last of a series, the culminating point of many wonders, the final link in a golden chain with which God would bind the hearts of His creatures to Himself. It is no solitary monument of omnipotent love. There are mighty steps which lead up to it. It is with the Blessed Sacrament as with the master peak in a great range of mountains. Looked at from the ground of the valley beneath, it looms dimly through its veil of cloud, all but indistinguishable. But let him who would see it follow the upward steps that lead to it. Let him ascend a lesser spur, then a higher ridge, then another crest, then again a loftier one, and he will find perhaps the clouds around or beneath him, but the final summit of the mighty mountain stands disclosed and clear in the upper sky. Many great facts of nature, and of science too, many of the greatest conclusions in the sphere of thought are only arrived at step by step, and may perplex and bewilder if taken

apart and by themselves, yet become clear and undeniable when the necessary steps are followed which lead up to them, as to a final issue. Thus it is with the Divine mystery of the Eucharist. It does not, and cannot stand by itself, or be looked at apart from those other great mysteries which form a series leading to it, as to a Divine sequel. Bethlehem must have gone before it; Nazareth must have preceded it; the teaching ministry of our Lord must have led the way to it; Calvary was absolutely essential to it, as the one foregoing Divine event of which it is both the sacramental fruit and the sacrificial commemoration.

1. What is the mystery of the Incarnation, accomplished in the midst of the stupendous humiliations which surround the stable of Bethlehem, but the revelation of God's desire to be with the children of men? Consider the Divine condescension which is willing to stoop so low, which, under the humblest conditions this earth can supply to it, leads Him who is the figure of the Father's substance and the brightness of His glory to come amongst men, "wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger".[1] We cannot contemplate such a mystery of Divine love from the low ground of human experience,

[1] Luke II. 12.

or of human reason. Bethlehem stands amongst the lofty heights of the mountains of God. It tells us that God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor His ways as our ways, but rather "as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are My ways exalted above your ways, and My thoughts above your thoughts".[1] Yet, full of wonder as it is, Bethlehem is not final, but rather a step leading on towards other mysteries, a height leading still higher in the sublime region of God's goodness to His creatures.

Moreover, there are early foreshadowings, and lines of similarity plainly marked in this first mystery, and that which we may regard as its final development. Do not the swathing bands, which wrapped the infant form of the Divine Word, prepare us to pass in thought to those sacramental veils which cover and enfold the same Adorable Body beneath the outward sign Divinely chosen?

2. Nazareth, again, follows upon Bethlehem, and though a veil hangs before it, as before another Holy of Holies, yet is there sufficient light given us by St. Luke to enable us to penetrate within, and learn what manner of life was lived there by Him who sitteth upon the Cherubim. "He went down with them and

[1] Is. LV. 9.

came to Nazareth, and was subject to them."[1] Subjection and obedience on the part of the Creator to the behests of His creatures, a lesson of thirty years' duration, is the one great mysterious fact, filling the greater part of that Life which was to be the Light of men. By disobedience and revolt the world fell from God; by obedience and the humility of a Divine Exemplar it must be restored to God. The spectacle is therefore presented to us of the second Person of the Adorable Trinity learning and practising obedience, that He might teach its saving virtue to men. "Whereas He was indeed the Son of God, He learned obedience by the things which He suffered; and being consummated He became, to all that obey Him, the cause of eternal salvation."[2] The love that drew the Eternal Word to espouse poverty in Bethlehem, draws Him again to learn obedience, even to His own creatures in Nazareth. Veiled in obscurity, yet luminously teaching through the days and years of His subjection to Mary and Joseph, from the inner sanctuary of His earthly home, He sets before men the primary lesson they need to learn, if they would return to their first allegiance, and find their way back to God.

What human imagination could have anti-

[1] Luke II. 51. [2] Heb. v. 8.

cipated the mystery of Nazareth, any more than that of Bethlehem? What conception of a Divine life to be so spent on earth would have entered the minds of men, or would have been deemed by them altogether consistent with the majesty of God dwelling amongst His creatures? Does it not introduce a wholly new and unexpected meaning into the prophet's words, "Verily Thou art a hidden God, the God of Israel, the Saviour"?[1] But here, again, the mystery of Nazareth is far from being final. It points onwards to the future, it has about it lines of adumbration corresponding to something coming after and going beyond it. It certainly leads the way to a further mystery of hidden majesty and Divine obedience, in which the Creator obeys the voice of the creature, and in accordance with Divine words, issuing indeed from God Himself, yet pronounced by merely human lips, the same Lord of all becomes present beneath the veils of the Eucharist, just as He lived and wrought and obeyed within the cloud of His obscurity at Nazareth. Thus the mystery of Nazareth is a step leading upwards, preparing our thoughts for, and in a sense foreshadowing, the mystery of the Eucharist.

3. Again, the manifold mystery of our Lord's

[1] Is. xlv. 15.

public life is not in any sense final. It is an intermediate part of a great whole. But in its words and acts it teaches more fully, explains more tenderly, accommodates more easily Divine truths to our feeble understandings, reveals the heart and inner thoughts of our Lord, in a way that enables us to know Him and see Him, as if we walked or sat in the midst of those first disciples who "companied with" Him.[1] He is the Teacher, the Divine Physician, the Founder of a new Kingdom "not of this world," the Giver of hope and grace, the Advocate of sinners, the Feeder of hungry multitudes, strength to the weak, health to the sick, and life to the dead. He reveals Himself in the gentle simplicity of His sermon on the mount, as He sat amongst His disciples, just as in the final act of His ministry He knelt before each of the twelve and, with a Divine humility, tenderly washed their feet. He reveals Himself in the Pharisee's house, when the "woman that was in the city, a sinner,"[2] came to kneel at His feet. Whereas the self-righteous men who sat at table with Him would have considered it contamination to be touched by such a one, He allowed her burning tears to fall upon His feet, permitted her to kiss those feet, blessed her sacrifice of an afflicted spirit, and for

[1] Acts I. 21. [2] Luke VII. 37.

the sake of her contrite and humble heart, pronounced a Divine absolution in the words, "Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much".[1] He reveals Himself again at Jacob's well, when, wearied with His journey, He sits down, and yet for all His weariness cannot refrain from labouring in behalf of the woman whose spiritual diseases He discloses, that He may lead her to rise from her degradation, and receive from His Divine hand purity and faith. He reveals Himself again when the multitudes follow Him into the "desert place" to which He had retired, and, when seeing them, He said, "I have compassion on the multitude, for if I shall send them away fasting to their home, they will faint in the way".[2] Omnipotence moved by Love provides for the hungering thousands, and the seven loaves and the few fishes are multiplied so abundantly that seven baskets are filled with the fragments that remained. He uses, moreover, in connexion with a similar occasion, the circumstance of His feeding His people, as their fathers were fed of old by manna in the desert, to announce to them another form of manna, another Divine Food for the hungry, a more wondrous multiplication of a Divine Bread. "I am the Bread of Life. Your fathers did eat manna in the desert, and are

[1] Luke v. 47. [2] Mark VIII. 23.

dead. . . . I am the Living Bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this Bread he shall live for ever."[1] It is true that oftentimes He wrought His mighty works with Divine profusion on behalf of the afflicted bodies of men. But all the while His mission was not to minister to the wants of the body, but to the deeper and more important wants of the soul. Hence He passed naturally from the bread of earth to the Bread of Heaven, and took occasion solemnly to announce the future gift, that "Living Bread" to be given for the souls of men, that, eating it, they might live for ever. The material multiplication of the lesser gift served sufficiently to foreshadow the sacramental multiplication of the greater one.

His life from the time when "He began to do and to teach"[2] was the type of the Church's life among the many generations of men; or rather was a model in brief of that life which He continues to live in His Church, repeating on a vaster scale what He first did or taught within the narrow limits of Judea and Galilee. Hence the mysteries of the short public ministry of our Lord are far from final, but point onward and upward. His saying, too, concerning miracles to be wrought by His disciples greater than those

[1] John vi. 48, 49, 51, 52. [2] Acts i. 1.

He was accustomed to work Himself, applies to the future, and points to mysteries of Grace and of Faith transcending the wonders which the first disciples had witnessed: "He that believeth in Me, the works that I do, he also shall do, and greater than these shall he do".[1]

When in the closing act of His public ministry, as He sat amongst the twelve, He solemnly instituted that which was to be the perpetual "remembrance" of Him, it was to be expected that in this heritage of His Love there should be permanently enshrined all the attributes revealed in the gracious acts of His earthly life, all the love and the mercy, the omnipotence and the Divine lavishness of measure in giving, which was symbolized in the desert place by the many baskets of fragments that remained over and above to them that had eaten. In a word, the public ministry of our Lord culminates in a great act and a Divine institution, and leads us on to the contemplation of a transcending mystery.

4. Beyond all other mysteries, Calvary is the great work of God which is essential as an antecedent to the sublime mystery of the Eucharist. By its very nature and institution, the Eucharist is the commemoration of Calvary and the fruit of the cross. If the cross is, in the new order of

[1] John xiv. 12.

things, the Tree of Life, the Holy Eucharist is the fruit of that tree, imparting its gift of immortality to all who taste it. With the mystery of the cross it is inseparably connected. Therefore may it be assumed that we are not prepared to contemplate it until we have first risen to the height whither we are called by the Divine Sacrifice of Calvary. It is by the actual demonstration, there offered to us, that we learn the great lesson that the mind of man must never set bounds to the infinite Love of God. It was by the process, conscious or unconscious, of putting human limits upon a Divine attribute, that the cross became "a stumbling-block to the Jews, and to the Gentiles foolishness".[1] God's ways are not as man's ways, nor must His Love be supposed to act only as man's love. It must not be made to stop short where the love of man would stop short. There is nothing partial, nothing measurable, nothing finite about that attribute which is the chief of God's perfections. If, then, Calvary sets before us the great truth, "exinanivit semetipsum"—"He emptied Himself,"[2] or stripped Himself of all for our sake, as an illustration of Divine Love, it prepares us for wonders which it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive, concerning the ways in which

[1] 1 Cor. i. 23. [2] Phil. ii. 7.

that Love may manifest itself, or the gifts it is ready to bestow. That "exinanitio," or deliberate laying aside of every shred of dignity, Divine and human, which took place on Calvary, is marvellously akin to that which faith puts before us in the mystery of the Eucharist, where no vestige is left perceptible to sense of either the Divine or human dignity of the Son of God. The annihilation of the cross prepares the way for the annihilation of the altar, and from Calvary to the Eucharist is but one further step in the course of illimitable love and in the scheme of plenteous redemption. As wrought on the cross, that mystery of redemption brought with it a general grace common to the whole mass of mankind. In the institution of the Eucharist, it was Divinely designed that the one far-off Divine event, which merited the universal grace, should be brought home to each man's heart and bosom; and that, not by any mere empty commemoration, but by a Divine realization of the past in the present, and an actual communication to the individual soul of all that was offered and all that was wrought upon the altar of the cross. The Lamb that was offered on Calvary was both a victim and a gift. In the Eucharist the merit of the victim is applied, and the communication of the gift is made to each individual soul, to

assure it of the fact that, however unworthy it may seem, it is yet the object of a Divine Love that knows nothing of human limitations.

Thus, through a series of Divine mysteries, ascending step by step the lofty heights of God's wonderful works, wrought in the accomplishment of man's redemption, we dispose our hearts and prepare our minds to contemplate the great mystery of the Eucharist. He who is unwilling to rise from height to height of the lofty mysteries preceding it, who has not "in his heart disposed to ascend by steps,"[1] who will not leave the trodden path of human reason or human experience even in the contemplation of the words and acts of God, can scarcely expect to see the mystery of the Eucharist disclosed in the clear light of faith, and crowning the great series of God's wonderful works. "Fundamenta ejus in montibus sanctis"—"The foundations thereof are in the holy mountains,"[2] the Psalmist sang of the city of God. In a similar strain we may sing of the "greatness" of the revelation of love contained in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, its foundations are in the holy mountains, and its roots in the great mysteries which unfold to us the vast design which began to be accomplished

[1] Ps. LXXXIII. 6. [2] Ib. LXXXVI. 1.

when "the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us".

II. "And invited many." It is to be noted that the giver of the feast in the parable, acting in conformity with the "greatness" of the supper, multiplies his invitations. It is not to any narrow circle of men, but to "many" that those invitations are sent. Probably that accounts for the little appreciation which the recipients of the favour display. Where a gift is desired, or an honour valued, no excuse is contemplated, and no difficulty suffered to stand in the way of its attainment. But a gift is so often valued amongst men rather because of its rarity than because of its intrinsic worth: and the fact of some great prize being open to many, rather than the privilege of the few, leads men to lose their eagerness to obtain it. Such is the tendency of our weak minds. Moreover, we do not give our best gifts or our most prized treasure to many, for the simple reason that we are, at the best, poor finite creatures, strictly limited in the measure of our possessions, however large those possessions may seem to be. Whatsoever we value most, and whatsoever we esteem as our best, we are forced in the nature of things to reserve to a few. Hence the besetting tendency of our minds to appreciate a gift just in proportion to the rarity with which

it is given. Thus it is with the guests in the parable. The invitations are numerous, the guests form a multitude, and accordingly the privilege of assisting at the great feast is unvalued and declined. To some the common pressure of daily occupations serves as a pretext; to another the pursuit of his own pleasure is a sufficient motive to seek escape from the unwelcome favour. Because the boon was largely given, it came to be regarded as of little worth. But their standard of appreciation was a false one: and the largeness of the scale upon which the favour was given did not in any degree detract from the value of the favour itself.

1. Something similar to this takes place in the minds of men, and serves them as an apparent reason to lower, or make improbable, the great doctrine of the real presence of our Lord in the Holy Eucharist. How, they ask, can so overwhelming a gift be offered to any but the most elect amongst the children of men? How can Divine Love empty its inmost treasure, to speak humanly, and pour it into the lap of every man, without regard or distinction of persons? Is not such a redundance of unspeakable beneficence, such a waste (as it would seem) of what is most Divine upon the least worthy of men, too excessive to contemplate? Is there not something incom-

patible between the incomprehensible greatness of the gift and the entire unreserve of its distribution?

Thus it may appear indeed to such as will persist in thinking humanly about God. To them, as to the men in the parable, the multitude of the invitations is a chief cause of prejudice to the greatness which is claimed for the gift. Yet what is this but to forget the difference between the love that is infinite and the love that is merely finite and human? Men cannot give their best treasure to all: but God can and does so give it. Does He not give Himself, or at least offer Himself, to all as their future bliss and possession in heaven? "I am thy reward exceeding great,"[1] was the promise to Abraham, and is made similarly to all. He is the possession of all the blessed. Does the universality of the gift lessen its greatness, or serve as a prejudice against its reality, or suggest any essential incompatibility in a union of love between the Divine and the human? The mystery of the Eucharist is, after all, only an earthly counterpart to the mystery of heaven itself. What God does there He wills also to do here. It is the same Love, acting in accordance with the different conditions and circumstances of the two spheres of life—time

[1] Gen. xv. 1.

and eternity—which He has given to the souls of men.

As has been said, man cannot give his best gifts to all. Yet our Lord, desirous that we should share the largeness of His Spirit, would have us strive to do so. Thus He spoke to the Pharisee who had invited Him to eat bread in his house: "When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind, and thou shalt be blessed, because they have not wherewith to make thee recompense: for recompense shall be made thee at the resurrection of the just".[1] The institution of the Eucharistic feast is the practical illustration of that doctrine of pure, disinterested Love, as preached by our Lord in the Pharisee's house. He is not content to invite the elect amongst thousands; souls whose spiritual beauty "the King shall greatly desire":[2] but equally with them "the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind". Moreover, He ordains that they shall not come to Him as Lazarus to the rich man's gate, begging for the crumbs that fall from his table. On the contrary, they shall enter into the feast prepared, they shall have their place at His royal table, they shall "eat bread in the Kingdom of God". "They shall be inebriated with the

[1] Luke XIV. 13, 14. [2] Ps. XLIV. 12.

plenty of Thy house: and Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of Thy pleasure."[1]

2. Again the parable shows a certain vehemence in the desire of him who gives the supper to see that supper filled with guests. His bounty is not to be frustrated by the insensibility of those whom he first intended to share it. So intense is his purpose, so vehement his desire, that the repeated command is given, "Compel them to come in". He will have his bountiful design to triumph, no matter what the obstacles are that human dullness of heart may oppose to it. His servants, too, understand the force of his desire; they carry out his command, and at length his house is filled with guests. Here also the parable sheds light upon an important aspect of the institution of the Eucharist. It sets before us the vehemence of Divine love in the institution of the great supper. "Compel them to come in" tells of the intensity of the desire of the Sacred Heart of Jesus that its most special gift should find full acceptance from men. Every means of bringing upon them the strong, yet free, constraint that love is wont to use, is adopted by Him to bring them to His sacramental table. It is written that when Lot lingered in his home at Sodom, after the warning of the angels, and was

[1] Ps. xxxv. 9.

loth to seek his safety in flight, the angel "pressed" him, and "took his hand".[1] Some such gentle compulsion the Divine Author of the Eucharist wills to lay upon us. For the merciful purposes of His all-wise love, He constrains us by His high command that we may not reject, to our own great loss, the gift that is offered us. "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you."[2] Under the threat of losing life itself, He compels men, not so much for His own sake as for theirs, to come and partake of His supper. In the terms of that royal command, they are warned that if they come they shall live, if they come not they shall perish, for the simple reason that apart from Him there is no life.

There is, to speak a little technically, as little limit to the extensive as to the intensive greatness of the Divine gift. The mind and intention of its Author is plainly indicated, and the widest acceptance, the fullest use of what He has given, must become the norm and ideal of all who would enter into His design. The Eucharist is a gift, issuing from Him as the fruit and token of His unspeakably ardent love. It is given, not to be distantly adored and reverently wondered at, but to be faithfully accepted and constantly received.

[1] Gen. xix. 16. [2] John vi. 54.

That is the will of its Author, and His will is sufficiently made known in the terms of the command which He has imposed.

3. There is, moreover, the important consideration that after all the Eucharistic precept is based, not only upon the Divine desire to be with the children of men, but also upon the Divine knowledge of man's innermost need. "Not on bread alone doth man live,"[1] the Old and New Testaments remind us. Partly, indeed, and in his material nature, he lives upon the bread of earth. It is his restorative, the renovation of spent powers and exhausted energies, the sustenance without which bodily life, like an unfed flame, would consume itself and utterly cease. But if the body turns to earth for its first great need, there is in that higher nature, which draws no nutrition from earth, a corresponding primary need for which the goodness of God has found a supply. The soul has its hunger, and for that hunger bread from heaven has been given it. As with the body, mere lapse of time is in itself sufficient to create the void and produce the need. But there is far more than the mere passing of time to drain its strength and energy. Day by day it wakens to fresh labours with besetting difficulties, to repeated

[1] Deut. VIII. 3; Matt. IV. 4.

struggles with temptation, to its wrestling not with flesh and blood but with Principalities and Powers, to the hard conditions of that state of warfare through which it is passing. When it is most fully living its true life, and most worthily realizing the ideals to which it is called, it is also most conscious of its own need, and of the faintness following upon prolonged exertion. And if its efforts be less worthy of its high aims, and its vitality has grown languid, still greater is the need, even though the sharpness of the hunger be not so fully felt. Whatsoever, in fact, serves as food must clearly be intended to meet a constantly recurring want. Hence follows the fitness and plain reasonableness of frequent communion.

In the nature of things, the bread that is given to satisfy the soul's hunger, is given rather according to the measure of human need than according to its own intrinsic excellence. If there is frequent and daily need, there is also frequent and daily cause for seeking the supply of that need such as has been Divinely provided.

It is true that there are two contrary impressions, or instincts of the heart, which faith may generate in connexion with the Holy Eucharist. On the one hand, the overwhelming sense of its dignity may overshadow every other

feeling, and may so fill the soul with awe and reverence that it can only find expression in the centurion's words, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof". Fear, in other words, may overrule desire and hold it back, not indeed in total disobedience to the Divine command, but in rare and hesitating acceptance of the royal invitation. On the other hand, there is that truer and more enlightened instinct, similarly inspired by faith, which does not indeed remove from the heart the sense of its own unworthiness, yet bids it respond to the love of Him who seeks it, and because He wills it to come to Him, takes its place in loving trustfulness at His royal table.

The whole dispensation of the Incarnation under which we live is not one of fear, but of love stirring the heart to make trustful response to the call which Divine love addresses to it. The words with which St. Paul describes the Christian dispensation apply pre-eminently to the Blessed Sacrament. "You have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."[1] It is as sons and heirs we are bidden to gather around our Father's table; and it is because faith tells us that His

[1] Rom. VIII. 15.

love awaits us, that our souls need Him, that we cannot grow less unworthy of Him except by approaching Him, that we must needs come at His word, and hesitate not to take our place at His Eucharistic table.

4. It was when the illumination of the Holy Spirit was fullest, and the graces of Pentecost most abundant in the Apostolic Church, that we read in the Acts of the Apostles,[1] "They were persevering in the doctrine of the Apostles, and in the communication of the breaking of bread, and in prayer". And again: "Continuing daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house". "Breaking bread from house to house" is the description of the daily sacramental life of the early Church. The decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, 20 December, 1905, alludes to the patristic interpretation of the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread". Here are some of the earliest commentaries on that petition, which incidentally declare the mind of the great doctors of the early Church on the subject of daily Communion. Following the line of thought expressed by Tertullian ("De oratione"), St. Cyprian thus comments on these words of the prayer: "Continuing the prayer, we say

[1] Acts II. 42, 46.

'Give us this day our daily bread'. This may be taken both in the spiritual and in the natural sense, both senses, by a Divine usefulness, being profitable unto our salvation. For the bread of life is none other than Christ, and He is not the bread of all indiscriminately, but our bread. As also we say, 'Our Father,' because He is the Father of them that know and believe, so we say 'our bread,' because Christ is the bread of them that belong to His body. We beg that this bread be given to us daily, lest although we be in Christ and daily receive the Eucharist for the food of salvation, through the intervention of some graver sin, abstaining and remaining uncommunicate and forbidden the Bread of Heaven, we come to be separated from Christ's body, according to His own warning words, 'I am the bread of life which came down from heaven: if any man eat of My bread he shall live for ever; and the bread I will give is My flesh for the life of the world'. When, therefore, He speaks of a man living if he eats of His bread, as it is manifest that they live who belong to His body and by right of membership receive the Eucharist; so is it contrariwise to be feared, so needs must we pray, lest while we abstain and keep apart from Christ's body, we remain also far separated from salvation, according to His threat in the

words, 'Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you'. Therefore we pray that our bread—that is, Christ—be given to us daily, that we who dwell and live in Christ may not depart from His sanctification and be cut off from His body."[1]

In the next century St. Jerome gives the following as his own interpretation, while he recognizes others: "When therefore we ask that God may give us our special and pre-eminent bread, we ask for Him who says: 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven'".[2]

In the treatise on the Sacraments commonly incorporated with the works of St. Ambrose there is the following interesting passage: "Give us this day our daily bread. I call to mind what I have before said on this subject. I have told you that before the words of Christ [i.e. the words of consecration], that which is offered is called bread: when the words of Christ are pronounced, it is no more called bread, but the Body. Why, therefore, in the Lord's Prayer which follows is it said 'our bread'? Bread indeed hath He called it, but ἐπιούσιον, that is supersubstantial. It is not indeed the bread that goeth into the body; but that bread of eternal life which stayeth up the

[1] Migne, "Patrologia," Vol. IV, p. 531.

[2] Migne, "St. Jerome Com. in Matt. vi.".

substance of our soul. Therefore it is called in Greek ἐπιούσιος—the Latin calling 'daily' bread what the Greek calleth 'coming' bread; for the Greeks call τὴν ἐπιοῦσαν ἡμέραν the coming day. Therefore both things which the Latin and the Greek express seem useful; but while the Latin saith 'daily,' the Greek hath the two-fold meaning. If it is 'daily' bread, why dost thou take it only after a year has run out, as is the fashion of the Greeks in the East? Take thou daily that which is daily profitable unto thee. He that is not worthy to receive daily is not worthy to receive yearly. In like manner Job of old offered daily sacrifice for his children, lest perhaps they had sinned in heart or tongue. Wherefore although thou understandest that as often soever as the sacrifice is offered the death of the Lord, His Resurrection and Ascension are shown forth, together with the remission of sins; dost thou not receive that bread of life? He that hath a wound needeth medicine. The wound is that of sin; the medicine is the heavenly and ever-venerable Sacrament."[1]

It may be added that St. John Chrysostom at Antioch and Constantinople with similar energy inveighed against the spiritual languor which

[1] Migne, "Patrologia"; St. Ambrose, "de Sacramentis," lib. v. cap. 4.

contented itself with a mere annual Communion. A further passage may be given to illustrate the teaching of the Anglo-Saxon Church, from a letter of him who was, perhaps, its chief exponent —the Venerable Bede. In the year 734 he wrote a letter of earnest appeal to Egbert, Archbishop of York, begging him to send preachers to instruct the people in their most important duties, and to teach them "how profitable is the daily reception of our Lord's body and blood to every class of Christians, according to the practice which you well know the Church to uphold throughout Italy, Gaul, Africa, Greece, and the whole East".[1]

When therefore we are reminded to-day concerning the fitness and utility of "frequent and daily Communion," the voice we hear is but the echo of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church from the apostolic age downwards. The message that is given us is no other than that which is conveyed in the command of Him who made the great supper—"Compel them to come in, that My house may be filled".

[1] See Fr. Bridgett's "History of the Holy Eucharist in Great Britain," Vol. I, p. 220. See also Appendix.

XV.

HOPE AND THANKSGIVING.

"Omne datum optimum et omne donum perfectum desursum est, descendens a Patre luminum, apud quem non est transmutatio nec vicissitudinis obumbratio."

"Every best gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change or shadow of alteration."—James I. 17.

THESE beautiful words of St. James tell us of one of the most sublime and yet one of the most hope-inspiring attributes of God.

I. "No change or shadow of alteration," the Apostle tells us, ever obscures the resplendent immutability of God. What a contrast is presented to us by such perfection as we see in things created, and such as exists in things Divine! Whatsoever is best and most beautiful on earth is by its very nature subject to the law of decay and change. All the glory of the most perfect landscape, all the fragrance of the fairest flowers, all that can bring pleasure or call out admiration as we look around us on earth passes in the

natural course of things, nor can it remain what it once was to us. The happiest day closes its waning hours in the evening and is soon absorbed in the darkness of night. That is the history of all our brief periods of pleasure.

The law of change is written across the face of this visible creation. The Psalmist said: "Thou in the beginning, O Lord, didst found the earth, and the works of Thy hands are the heavens. They shall perish, but Thou shalt continue: and they shall all grow old as a garment, and as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed. But Thou art the self-same, and Thy years shall not fail."[1]

So again men change. With their imperfect natures and recurring defects of character, there is no friendship to be found that is free from every cloud of misunderstanding, or that suffers no shadow ever to rest upon its brightness. Even when the rarest affection and most precious friendship has run its course almost unclouded, then death comes to make it share the fate of all things human. Night is ever closing with its deep shadow over the most perfect day.

There is no secret by which we may learn to hold what our hand for the moment grasps. There is no security against a change which may

[1] Ps. CI. 26 *seq.*

alter all things in life for us. It is in the very nature of things created. No one can have gone far upon the road of life without having had some striking experience of the fact.

When we pass to consider the perfections of God, we come to that which is highest, and which must ever remain highest. By virtue of His own perfection, God is unchangeable. No cloud obscures, no shadow of alteration passes over the glory of that supreme immutability.

It is true that there are expressions in the Holy Scriptures in which the language of inspiration condescends to our weakness, and addresses our minds after their own human habits and forms of thought. Thus, in the book of Genesis it is said of God, "It repented Him that He had made man on the earth. And being touched inwardly with sorrow of heart, He said, I will destroy man."[1] Again God says to Moses on the mount, "Let Me alone that My wrath may be kindled against them, and that I may destroy them".[2] The Psalmist asks, "Shall Thine anger burn like fire?"[3] Again, "Rebuke me not in Thy indignation, nor chastise me in Thy wrath".[4] St. Paul has the words, "Grieve

[1] Gen. vi. 67. [2] Ex. xxxii. 10.
[3] Ps. lxxxiii. 47. [4] Ib. vi. 1.

not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption".[1] Again, "The Spirit Himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings".[2]

It must ever be borne in mind that there is no change in God literally corresponding to these words. We cannot see Him in His actual perfection, and we are obliged to use words concerning Him that are not strictly applicable to His Divine nature, yet express some aspect of a truth in the way that is most intelligible and striking to us. Human language must needs be imperfect when it attempts to describe what God thinks or what He feels. The law of Divine perfection is that which alone expresses the acts and thoughts of Divine Justice, or Mercy, or Love. God does not, like man, change from the severe mood of justice to the tender mood of compassion and love, swayed at one time and another by different and conflicting emotions. He is not, like men, a compound of changing and successive sentiments and phases of thought. He is absolute in His perfections, wholly transcending circumstances of time and space, wholly free from any dependence upon the action of His creatures, ever true to Himself, ever incapable of imperfection, and therefore unchangeable.

[1] Eph. IV. 30. [2] Rom. VIII. 26.

All that happens is foreseen, all that will happen is foreknown, and nothing therefore can disturb that Divine and all-perfect immutability. The hidden principle of Divine perfection is ever exercising its activity, and according to its effects as they are made known to us, we attribute to God the thoughts or the feelings which the Divine action suggests to our own minds. But all the while "God is not as man that He should lie, nor as the son of man that He should be changed".[1] If all that comes under the knowledge of sense, all that is bitter or sweet in our experience of life tells of instability, unrest, and change, yet there is One supreme centre of rest, one supreme Essence of immutable perfection, over which no shadow of alteration passes.

The remembrance of that attribute of God which makes Him ever the same to us is at all times an important source of strength to our weak souls. "He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust,"[2] and He sees us as dust carried before the wind of passion. He is ready to make allowance for our inconstancy. He can see mitigating circumstances in our sin, even as our Lord did in His prayer on the cross. As a loving Father He can exercise compassion towards the faults of His wayward children, because

[1] Num. xxiii. 19. [2] Ps. ciii. 14.

He is still their Father and is unchangeable in His love.

Men may fail us, because they are men, and by no means ever the same. We may hurt their susceptibilities, or injure their just rights, or return ingratitude for their kindness, and then it is all over with their friendship or love for us. It has been killed, doubtless, through our own act and by our own fault. The sweetness that was once in their hearts, turning them in kindly affection towards us, is there no longer, or it has changed perhaps into some bitter form of enmity and ill-will in our regard. That is what we are accustomed to see in the men around us. But with God it is ever true, in the Evangelist's words, that "having loved His own, He loved them unto the end".[1] He suffers no change, His love never grows cold, nor can it ever be appealed to in vain. It is never so weary of our failings as to wholly cease. A father's love to an unworthy son does not wholly die because of the son's ingratitude. In bitter disappointment it awaits better things. It looks patiently for a return to some filial sense of duty and some remembrance of the tender bonds of past affection, some reawakening of nature in the frost-bound heart. But from God "all paternity in heaven

[1] John XIII. 1.

and earth is named".[1] His fatherly love is eternal—"I have loved thee with an everlasting love".[2]

The prodigal may wander far indeed, but he can never, for all his sin, get beyond the limits of a love that patiently awaits his return. He can never turn back from his wanderings and his degradation, and knock at the door of his Father's house to find it closed against him with no welcome and no recognition. All the beautiful picture of the prodigal's father in the parable is a description of the love of God, ever unchanging, ever ready to bless the least advance made towards it on the part of him who has done all to forfeit it. The patient expectancy of the Father's love, watching its opportunity to assert itself, is represented in the words of the parable —"When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and running to him fell upon his neck and kissed him".[3] Thus does the everlasting love of God greet the first effort on the part of man to return to Him; thus does He enfold him in the strong arms of His grace and lead him tenderly homewards.

Moreover, in order that the intensity of that love may be brought home to our human thought,

[1] Eph. III. 15. [2] Jer. XXXI. 3. [3] Luke XV. 20.

the further picture is added of high festival in heaven in the celebration of the triumphant love of God. Joy, such as men feel on earth in their deliverance from a great sorrow, or the recovery of a lost treasure, is communicated to the angels of God, and they are bidden to rejoice over the repentant sinner as over one who to his Father was dead and is come back to life, who was lost and is found. Thus in human language, and in terms intelligible to our human hearts, the undying and unchanging love of God to His unworthy children is made clear and placed beyond doubt. How strong is the motive for hope, how urgent is the motive for repentance contained in that truth of the immutability of God.

There is something, also, still more wonderful in our Lord's acts and words during His public ministry, telling us of the inextinguishable love of God even towards the obdurate and unrepentant. The tears of our Lord, shed over the rebellious obstinacy of Jerusalem, show that though the heart of man may grow hardened against the grace of God, yet the love of God remains the same. A similar lesson is contained in the plaintive words, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent to thee, how often would I have gathered together thy children as the hen doth

gather her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldst not".[1]

Severe as the sentence of eternal Justice may be, yet there is no failure, no cessation in the activity of the love that was from the beginning. Many waters cannot quench it, neither can the floods of human ingratitude drown it. Man's free will may resist and render void every gift of grace and every proof of his Father's love. Yet it can make no change in the nature of that love itself, nor can it make it cease to be. Let but the creature be willing to accept the gift, let the soul but render itself capable of receiving the grace that is offered it, and man may prove by his own experience how infinite is the force, how immutable is the nature of the love that is Divine.

II. But if that Divine immutability conveys its message of hope and inspires thoughts of repentance for sin, so also must it be said to lead us to the feet of God in prayer and praise. The ever-continuous bounty of God, the ever-unceasing activity of His love suggest to us the duty of thanksgiving. All that is best within us is His gift. All that nature craves for, insufficient as it is for its own deeper needs, must come from that one unfailing Source. "Every best gift

[1] Matt. xxiii. 37.

and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights." The stream of His bounty never contracts in volume and never runs dry. The fountain of His paternal love is never sealed up.

On earth it is a rare thing to find a love that never flags in giving away its best. Scarcely is it to be found at all when there is no return made and no appreciation shown of its gifts. The springs of human kindness are soon dried up if they are not fed by outward marks of visible gratitude. Yet with God there is no cessation of His ever-active bounty. Even to them that obstinately reject it, grace is given sufficient in itself to enable them to work out their destiny and attain to heaven. The failure is on the part of man's will, not of God's. The love of God is ever operating, ever manifesting itself. In that sense must we take our Lord's words—"My Father worketh until now, and I work".[1] In the distribution of His gifts there is no weariness, no fitful interruption, no forgetfulness, no limit of duration, no shadow of alteration passing over the goodness of God.

Of the greater part of men it may doubtless be said that there is little sense of their indebtedness for the gifts so abundantly coming to them.

[1] John v. 17.

Despite their mature years and fully developed intelligence, they are too frequently as little conscious of what they receive as is the infant sleeping on its mother's breast of all the love bestowed upon it, and the numberless tokens of affection of which it is the recipient. Life goes on with its succession of years, the course of nature continues with no disturbing element in its evenness, and men seem to need the occurrence of some unwonted event, or the disappointment of some human hope, to bring them to a sense of their own insufficiency, and their dependence upon the bounty and Providence of God. It is for that reason that saints have reckoned sickness amongst the better gifts of grace. They explain that it awakens consciousness, restores to the soul its memory of things received, and redresses the spiritual balance of conscience in the more important matters of life.

It would be contrary, indeed, to all sense of duty to allow the mere regularity of bounteous giving on the part of God to lessen or take away from us the spirit of gratitude for the good things given us. The gracious quality of immutability in His love, which appeals to us as one of God's most beautiful attributes, would then be allowed by human perversity to serve as a pretext for thankless insensibility. If it needs the sharp

spur of pain, or sickness, or temporal adversity to deliver us from such a state as this, then the apparent evil that visits us has also its hidden good. Yet so severe a process ought not to be needed, and it is for our own interest that it should not be needed, to produce in us a spirit of gratitude to God.

We need only to look into ourselves, and into our past history, to consider the things that draw memory back to linger on the past, and we are compelled to apply to ourselves St. Paul's words—"What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received?"[1] Moreover, the continuance from day to day of gifts which we know form no part of our inalienable possession, gifts without which neither soul nor body can continue in their several spheres of life, without which both nature and grace must for us cease to exist, all these call upon us for the duty of thanksgiving, and bid us make solemn confession of our indebtedness. We cannot number the multitude of these benefits: we cannot estimate them at their full worth, any more than we can measure the love of which they are the tokens. More especially is this true of those invisible gifts of the Spirit, such as are indicated by the Apostle

[1] Col. iv. 7.

when he speaks of "every perfect gift," that wonderful series of ineffable communications of the Divine nature to our inner spirit. According to our capacity to receive them, they are given to us in immeasurable abundance.

But all this stream of gifts and favours, descending to us from the Father of lights, demands on our part the cultivation of the spirit of gratitude, and the regular exercise of the prayer of thanksgiving. The Holy Scripture abounds in urgent precepts concerning it. Thus St. Paul's words, "giving thanks always for all things, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God and the Father".[1] Again, "All whatsoever you do in word or in work, all things do ye in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father by him".[2] On the solemn occasions when He multiplied the loaves for the multitudes, and again when He stood at the grave of Lazarus, our Lord prefaced His mighty works with the prayer of thanksgiving, "When He had given thanks, He distributed to them that were sat down".[3] "Taking the seven loaves and the fishes, and giving thanks, He break and gave to His disciples."[4] "Father, I give Thee thanks that Thou hast heard Me."[5] The commendation

[1] Eph. iv. 20. [2] Col. iii. 17. [3] John iv. 11.
[4] Matt. xv. 36. [5] John xi. 14.

of the leper who returned alone amongst the ten to give thanks, falling upon his face at our Lord's feet, contains in itself a lesson and a command to offer thanksgiving to God. "Were not ten made clean? and where are the nine? There is no one found to return and give glory to God but this stranger."[1] The highest act of Christian worship, and the centre of the sacramental life of the Church is the sacrifice and the sacrament of the Eucharist. It is the Divinely instituted expression of supreme thanksgiving to God. Great as it is in its many different aspects, it affords us at all times the most solemn and the most fitting means of making such thanksgiving.

In the public prayer of the Church, the first words are those of gratitude and praise. "O Lord, Thou wilt open my lips and my mouth shall declare Thy Praise." The canticles of thanksgiving form the most prominent feature of its different hours—the Te Deum of Matins, the canticle of Zachary at Lauds, of our Blessed Lady at Vespers, and of Simeon at Complin. We cannot too fully realize the truth of the majestic words of the Preface in the Mass: "It is truly meet and just, right and salutary, that we do always and in all places give thanks to Thee, O holy Lord, Father almighty, eternal God". The faith which

[1] Luke xvii. 17.

finds expression in grateful thanksgiving to God for what He has already given, is also the faith which moves Him to give still more. The prayer of thanksgiving is not only an acceptable offering of praise to Him: it is also a most salutary means of promoting the spiritual and temporal interests which we ourselves have at heart.

In a word, the worship of the Church on earth, making supplication for its needs, must ever be joined in harmony with the Church in heaven which has no needs, but only seeks expression for its joyous prayer of thanksgiving and praise. Gratitude for the same all-bounteous love, which pours out its treasure of grace in the present and gives its everlasting return of glory in the future, must unite earth with heaven in a perpetual prayer of deep and absorbing thanksgiving. "And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them: I heard all saying: To Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, benediction and honour and glory and power for ever and ever."[1]

[1] Apoc. v. 13.

XVI.

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

"Quia respexit humilitatem ancillæ suæ. Ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes."

"Because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid: for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."—Luke i. 48.

I. It was decreed by God that throughout the whole accomplishment of the mystery of the Incarnation, the inalienable glory of the Son of God should be hidden from the eyes of men. Not only was it inconspicuous, but deeply shrouded from all human observation under an exterior aspect of deepest lowliness and humiliation. The world was unconscious of the glory it contained: "the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it".[1] A multitude in a desert place that had been fed by Him in their hunger, just as Moses had of old fed their fathers with manna, sought in a moment of passing grat-

[1] John i. 5.

itude to honour Him as their King. But the general mass of men showed no recognition of glory within the veil of outward obscurity which He assumed. Once only in the course of His earthly career did He permit the veil to be lifted, and the essential glory of His sacred humanity to flash forth. But it was for a very brief moment of time, and limited to the sight of three chosen Apostles, even those who similarly shared the apostolic office having no part in that vision. On earth recognition did not come from the children of men to the Divine greatness and supreme perfection that dwelt in the midst of them.

It was only on the day of His Ascension that our Lord in His sacred humanity received a full recognition of that honour and glory which belonged to Him. Then "ascending on high, He led captivity captive";[1] as a conqueror from afar, having regained a lost world and restored a vast realm to the dominion of His Father, having accomplished above measure abundantly the Divine mission on which He was sent, having carried to absolute completion the will of His Father, He entered in triumph into that Kingdom where He is to reign for ever. Then was the full glory of His sacred humanity made manifest. Then did He receive full recognition of the greatness that

[1] Eph. IV. 8; Ps. LXVII. 19.

stooped so low for love of men, and of the mighty victory which His Divine humiliation had won.

What is true of our Lord is also true of His saints. How often it happens that their spiritual worth, their true greatness is wholly unknown amongst men. The world does not appreciate them, nor know their names, nor is it even aware of their existence. It has its crude material standards by which it compares man with man, and estimates the degree of honour which it will render to them that claim it. But it has no standard of measurement to deal with the retiring humility, or the heroic self-denial, or the supernatural perfection of the saints.

Therefore it is that its judgments will be so often reversed. "The first shall be last and the last first."[1] Some of the lowliest of the children of men, whose true greatness escaped all human observation and was known only to God, will receive due recognition and rise to highest honour in the Kingdom where there is no respect of persons, and Divine justice renders to every soul according to its works. To many a hidden saint the words will be spoken, "Friend, go up higher," and he will receive glory from them that hitherto knew him not. One rule and one great principle determining that future greatness

[1] Matt. xix. 30.

in the Kingdom of God is given us, and it needs to be ever kept in mind as a guide to our thoughts. It is this—"Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted".[1]

II. What is true of our Lord, and of the saints in general, is also in a special manner true of the Blessed Mother of God. Within that cloud of earthly obscurity which covered the life of the Incarnate Word amongst men, she was called to enter and remain. She shared with Him the humiliations which He chose for Himself in His coming to the world, she was united with Him in the poverty and nakedness of Bethlehem, and again in the flight to Egypt and His exile there. Through the many years of lowly labour and humblest dependence upon the scanty return that labour brought at Nazareth, she shared the daily life of Her Divine Son in all its earthly privation and sacrifice. She was parted from Him in the years of His public ministry, or could only follow Him afar off, but she is with Him again in the closing scene of His life, when His mission is accomplished and He is lifted up as the victim of sacrifice upon the cross.

In His supreme humiliation she has her part allotted to her. None drank of the chalice which

[1] Luke xiv. 11.

He had chosen to drink to the same extent as she did. For to her alone the prophecy was made when the Passion was foretold. "Thine own soul a sword shall pierce."[1] As fully as she had shared the lowliness of Bethlehem, she also shared with Him the reproach of the cross. But the words of St. Paul make the cross of Christ the cause and measure of the supreme exaltation of His sacred humanity in its subsequent glory. "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross. For which cause God also hath exalted Him."[2] Corresponding to the abyss of humiliation into which He had descended, is the transcending greatness of the glory which afterwards by double right was His due.

Inasmuch as to be associated with Him in the mystery of the cross must needs imply a corresponding association with Him in the mystery of His glory, so also the words of St. Paul will in a singular manner apply to Mary, "For which cause God also hath exalted her". The principle is laid down by the Apostle, "If we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His Resurrection". "Yet so if we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him."[3]

[1] Luke II. 34. [2] Phil. II. 8, 9. [3] Rom. VI. 5; VIII. 17.

Inasmuch as none more fully shared the cross with Christ than Mary His mother, and none was more closely planted together with Him in the likeness of His death, so must there needs come to her a share in the glory of His Resurrection which is quite alone in its greatness.

The royal dignity bestowed upon the most highly favoured of all creatures, if it received no more recognition on earth than did the Divine dignity of her Son, at length received its full recognition and its exalted crown in the Kingdom of God. When, therefore, the Apostle was given his vision of the heavenly Jerusalem, it was only in harmony with all the rest that was revealed to him when he saw a great sign in heaven, "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars".[1] That was the glory corresponding to the angel's words, "The Lord is with thee, blessed art thou amongst women," and to her own prophecy, "Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed". And all the while in that supreme exaltation, in that highest glory of heaven, there is the fulfilment of the words, "Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted". The willing acceptance of the

[1] Apoc. XII. 1.

lowliest place on earth, the absolute conformity of the will of Mary with the will of Jesus in all the deep mysteries of His humiliation, leads to that highest place in the Kingdom of God which shall never be taken away from her.

Something more, however, is celebrated in the Feast of the Assumption of Mary than that which we celebrate in the Feasts of the Saints. On those recurring days which are dedicated to the memory of the saints, we honour the entrance of the souls of God's servants into the possession of their glory and their crown. They have laid down the burden of the body, and have gone forth as from a house of bondage to receive the long-desired fruition of all their faith and hope, to hear the sweetness of the Divine invitation, "Enter into the joy of thy Lord". But the body which is left behind remains subject to the common law of decay. It must submit to that corruption of the grave which is the symbol and the fruit of the spiritual disorganization of sin.

From that penalty of sin the ancient tradition of the Church believes Mary to have been exempt. It has ever seemed fitting to the instinct of faith to believe that the body, which was untainted by sin, should also be untouched by the corruption which follows upon sin. That it should be subject to death was only to follow the example

of Him, who, though Lord of life, became obedient unto death. But the sacred shrine in which the Eternal Word had tabernacled, which He had consecrated by His long in-dwelling, seemed too fully sanctified by its close contact with Him to be permitted to see corruption.

We are told in St. Matthew's gospel that, as a sequel to our Lord's death and a consequence of His Resurrection, "Many bodies of the saints that had slept arose, and coming out of the tombs after His Resurrection, came into the holy city and appeared to many".[1] Here we have an anticipation of the Resurrection which is to take place at the last day. These risen saints, awaking with Christ as the first-fruits of His triumphant Resurrection, bore witness to the words, "The hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live".[2] These were they who followed in His train, when in His Ascension He is said to have "led captivity captive," and when as a conqueror He entered in state into his Kingdom. But if this anticipation of the general Resurrection was granted to those servants of God who could only from afar off behold and salute the promises,[3] it is still more to be expected that such a privilege should come to the

[1] Matt. xxvii. 52, 53. [2] John v. 25. [3] Heb. xi. 13.

Divinely chosen instrument through whom those promises were fulfilled. The living temple in which the Most High had dwelt, which He had by a supreme gift of grace preserved from all desecration of sin, must surely have possessed equally with others, in a pre-eminent degree, the privilege of rising with Christ.[1]

It was this conviction of the privilege of Mary that made St. Epiphanius, the contemporary and friend of St. Jerome, say, in a well-known passage of his book on Heresies, that he dared not assert that she had suffered death at all, so probable did it appear to him that she had been endowed with the gift of corporal immortality. It is certainly re-

[1] St. Thomas appears to hold ("Summa," tertia pars, q. 53, a. 3) that the corporal assumption of our Blessed Lady was a unique privilege granted to the Mother of God, and that the bodies resuscitated at our Lord's Resurrection soon after returned to the grave. On the other hand, St. Matthew may be taken and is taken by Suarez and other eminent theologians, to speak of a full Resurrection from the dead, corresponding to that of our Lord Himself, which was granted to some of the saints, as the immediate effect of Christ's victory over death, and a presage of the general Resurrection. The arising of the saints is connected by St. Matthew with the Resurrection of our Lord as effect with cause, just as St. Paul connects the general Resurrection (1 Cor. xv. 22) with that of Christ. By reason of this connexion, it seems most probable that the Resurrection granted to the saints was final and complete.

markable that there are no relics of the body of Mary known to the Church, similar to those of other saints which have ever been held in veneration. The primitive Christians loved to honour the relics of Apostles and martyrs, eager to possess what they deemed a sacred treasure, visiting the martyrs' tombs and invoking their intercession. Tradition pointed indeed to the tomb of Mary, but that tomb, after its first brief period of occupation, was ever shown to be empty, no relic remaining of the sinless body that had lain there. It appeared indeed that it was to be no part of the sacred treasure of the Church on earth, for the simple reason that it had already become the possession of the Church triumphant.

It is true that the corporal assumption of Mary into heaven is no article of Catholic faith, and no dogma explicitly defined by the Church. Yet it has the weight and authority of a primitive tradition, supported by the teaching of the Fathers, commending itself to the common instincts of Christian faith, and receiving witness from the liturgies, or the public declarations of the Church throughout East and West.[1] It would be rash

[1] The following words, taken from the Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Jerusalem, 1672, are typical of the teaching of the Orthodox Eastern Church. "What is it that can be intended as a great sign in heaven, where God dwelleth, and

indeed to reject such a universal belief of Catholic piety. The Church, it must be remembered, is not only guided by the Holy Ghost when it exercises its high magisterium and issues its solemn laws of faith, but also in that constant traditional teaching by which it hands down the lesser details of Christian truth, and the practical devotion of Christian piety.

The disciple beneath the cross, whose love was rewarded by the last words of his Master, was charged to take upon himself the place of Christ in relation to Mary. That new bond of union, as between Mother and Son, the Church loves to regard as the rightful privilege of all who desire to inherit the faith and love of the Apostle. "From that hour the disciple took her to his own,"[1] St. John writes, and the home of John was, for the remaining years of her earthly exile,

the holy Powers are present? It is none other than the Panagia [the all-holy one], who was a great sign upon the earth, since she begat God Incarnate, and in begetting remained undefiled and a virgin, and is spoken of as a sign in heaven. Because she ascended with her body into heaven; for although she left that immaculate tabernacle of hers in the tomb, yet after three days she was translated into heaven with her body, as Christ also was taken up" (p. 35, "Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Jerusalem," tr. by Robertson Baker, 1899).

[1] John xix. 27.

the home of Mary. But the dreariness of exile must have its end, the patient awaiting must have its reward. "Behold, my beloved speaketh to me: Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come. For winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning is come."[1] The appointed hour at length arrived when the true Son of Mary came to take her to His home, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and in the company of many thousands of angels there to enthrone her.

Hitherto the Psalmist's words were verified in her, "All the glory of the King's daughter is within". Now, in the day of her triumph, as she enters with fitting state into the Kingdom of her Son, the Psalmist sings of her, "The queen stood on Thy right hand in gilded clothing".[2] Great indeed must have been the final honour accorded to her whom the King delighted to honour. She had been the chief work of His grace on earth: she becomes accordingly the chief sharer of His glory in heaven.

III. How wonderful is God in the richness of His compensations! That is the inspiring thought presented to us in the history of God's dealings with His servants, and more especially

[1] Cantic. II. 10, 11. [2] Ps. XLIV. 9, 14.

in the final triumph of His saints. That is the thought arising out of all celebration of the glories of Mary. Men are wont to give their best wine first, and the supply is soon exhausted. God keeps the best wine of His consolations to the end, and its store is inexhaustible. All that is worst, from the point of view of nature, may be allotted to us for our portion in the course of our present pilgrimage. It is perfectly possible that life, so far as concerns this world, may be little better than a series of disappointed hopes, where no effort attains its end, no harvest is ever reaped, no success ever attained. An individual life may, in the darkness of its shadows, approach externally to a close resemblance with that sacred life of sorrow which ended on the cross. Yet let the portion of any one in the present be as bitter as it may, there is an abundant compensation infallibly awaiting the willing sacrifice he has been ready to offer. Every draught of the cup of the Passion of Christ serves to prepare him that willingly partakes of it for the plenty of that house of God, of which it is said, "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of Thy pleasure".[1] Such is the message of faith, such the lesson coming to us from the triumph

[1] Ps. xxxv. 9.

of the saints. That is the secret by which they turned the bitter into sweet, pain into pleasure, sorrow into joy.

But the doctrine of the Communion of Saints makes the glory of Mary and of the saints not only a personal privilege to them, but a heritage of joy also to the Church on earth. St. Paul tells us that the Church militant has its share in the rejoicing of the Church triumphant—"If one member glory, all the members rejoice with it".[1] We are indeed fellow-citizens with the saints, and members of the same great household of God. Therefore the Church in exile rejoices with the Church in its abiding home, echoes its canticles of thanksgiving, and repeats in the distance the songs of Sion.

By reason, however, of our fellowship with the saints, there comes to us not only the privilege of uniting with them in thanksgiving, but also of asking them to unite with us in our petitions to God. We have still hanging over us the dread possibility of losing all, while we desire feebly to gain all. Therefore do we need their help. The practical fruit of our union with them is the assistance we may derive from their prayers, from the constant exercise of their intercession, from that efficacy which they add to our unworthy prayers

[1] 1 Cor. xii. 26.

by making common cause with us in our supplication. "The continual prayer of a just man availeth much."[1] Therefore the glory of the saints has its practical aspect of utility for us.

Uniting, therefore, in filial devotion, as we celebrate the glories of Mary, we may call upon her in the words attributed to St. Augustine: "Holy Mary, succour the suffering, help the faint-hearted, comfort the mourners, pray for the people, plead for the clergy, intercede for the devoted female sex; let all experience the boon of thy help who join in making holy commemoration of thee".

[1] James v. 16.

XVII.

ON FAITH.

"Adhuc enim modicum aliquantulum qui venturus est veniet, et non tardabit; Justus autem meus ex fide vivit."

"For yet a little and a very little while, and He that is to come, will come, and will not delay. But my just man liveth by faith."—Heb. x. 37, 38.

If it be asked what is the first line of distinction to be drawn between a saint and the ordinary type of Christian, it may be said simply to lie in the different kinds of faith found in both. It is the varying quality of the first theological virtue that makes the initial difference between the one and the other, and puts the saint in a category apart.

The pre-reformation centuries of English history were essentially ages of faith, as distinguished from the later times of commercial materialism. In those ages of faith there was an atmosphere wholly different from ours, full of influences stimulating to high supernatural ideals, in which saints grew up and flourished like flowers

in a garden. Despite its present materialism, England was once rich in every type of spiritual beauty. Kings and bishops, missionaries and contemplatives, monks and parish priests, cloistered virgins innumerable and saintly matrons fill our ecclesiastical annals with the fame of their heroic sanctity. And in addition to those whose names are found in the church's calendar, glimpses are afforded us in the lives of those who were canonized of the high spiritual perfection reigning in family circles, where the uncanonized sanctity of a mother or a father is fully worthy of association with that of their more illustrious son. How much, for example, was St. Edmund indebted to his zealous mother for the incessant love and practise of mortification which made his sanctity so heroic? Saints were comparatively numerous because faith pervaded the different departments of life, and filled the minds, if it did not always govern the actions, of men.

I. On the part of God, faith is a grace communicating to the soul the first element of its supernatural life. It is a grace—for on the occasion of Peter's solemn confession of faith, our Lord insisted on the fact, "flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but My Father who is in heaven".[1] On the part of man, it is a willing

[1] Matt. xvi. 17.

acceptance of the grace, and a full assent to the Divine truth proposed to him. It may serve a useful purpose to call attention to the distinction, made by Cardinal Newman in his "Grammar of Assent," between two kinds of assent which he calls notional and real. There is a purely intellectual assent given to mere self-evident truths or abstract ideas, such as is given to the axioms, "The part is less than the whole," "Truth cannot contradict truth". Quite different is the assent given to concrete truths, or facts, especially to such as touch us personally ; such as "George V is the lawful King of England," "My soul is immortal," "God is Love".

The assent given to these facts, or concrete truths, is a real assent, not merely notional or intellectual. It exercises some living force upon us. It possesses not only our intellect, but in some degree our whole being. It does not take away free will, or exercise any physical compulsion, but yet it has a power to move, to stimulate, to waken into activity sense and imagination, mind and body. Cardinal Newman says of real assents : "These beliefs, be they true or false in the particular case, form the mind out of which they grow, and impart to it a seriousness and manliness which inspires in other minds a confidence in its views, and is one secret of per-

suasiveness and influence in the public stage of the world".[1]

If we may use, for the purpose of description, these terms in relation to the subject of faith, we may say that we want to make our faith not notional, but real; not a cold intellectual assent, but an all-moving, all-inspiring conviction of the soul. That is the special end and object of the important spiritual exercise of daily meditation.

The practical definition of faith is given us in the Epistle to the Hebrews. "Now, faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not."[2] That is to say, it is no mere shadowy representation of eternal truth. It is not a vague, unsubstantial set of notions about far-distant facts and things. It is "the substance of things to be hoped for"—for there is nothing unsubstantial in the word of God. It has about it the solidity of eternal truth. As our Lord claims for His word, the soul can rest upon it as upon the one enduring immutable reality, amid all the passing changes of life around it. Faith is thus an incipient possession, a pledge in keeping of the things to be hoped for, that as yet appear not. It is real as they are real; certain as they are certain. It is not a strange, illusive formula of words, or a set of mystic

[1] "Grammar of Assent," p. 88. [2] Heb. xi. 1.

symbols, presenting to different ages a different sense : showing itself, Proteus-like, to successive generations in different forms, a sort of changeling of the centuries, varying according to the perpetual variations of men's ideas and prepossessions. It is by its origin one and unchangeable, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

Again, the Holy Scripture calls faith "the evidence of things that appear not". It is something which takes the place of the material organ of sense, where that organ can no more avail. It is, as it were, a new faculty added on to nature, opening worlds hidden to nature. It is a Divinely awakened sense of sight in the soul, a spiritual gift of vision which enables us to penetrate the veil of matter, hiding behind it the world of spirit and the life that knows no death. The Psalmist has the words, "In lumine tuo videbimus lumen"—"In Thy light we shall see light".[1]

In that beatific vision, where all things are seen in God, they are seen in their true light. Errors, such as we are prone to now, will be impossible then. Now it happens that, through the refracting medium of material sense or inclination, a false colour is seen, bright hues rest upon things in themselves utterly dark and uncomely.

[1] Ps. xxxv. 10.

We are deceived into thinking fair and beautiful many things that are hideous and vile. Thus sin wears its outward guise of false attractiveness. But in the light of God we see true light and shade, and cannot be deceived. Truth shines out, evil cannot hide itself under a mask. That, we may say, is a law of the unerring vision which the blessed have in heaven.

But we may also say that faith on earth, and the intuitions of faith, are the counterpart of that vision of the blessed. Here, too, the words are verified, "In Thy light we shall see light". The more perfect is the gift of faith, the more do its intuitions approach in truth, in clearness, in due sense of proportion, to the vision of the blessed. It measures all things around it and above it with a skilled eye, as an artist viewing a picture, or an architect a great building. It does not confuse objects. It does not see "men as trees walking". It does not mistake a shadow for the substance. It does not mistake the temporal for the eternal. It does not mistake the road to hell for the path to heaven.

Being, then, a gift which, by a law of spiritual development, is to expand into the beatific vision, it is not surprising that the great things accomplished by the servants of God in the Old and New Testaments are traced to it as to their

cause. The same Epistle to the Hebrews tells in detail of its effects, and the spiritual power which it imparted to the servants of God. Faith was the secret, we are told, of Abel's sacrifice "exceeding that of Cain, by which he obtained a testimony that he was just," so that "being dead, he yet speaketh".[1] It was faith that saved Noe. It was faith that exalted Abraham to his unique vocation, and made him the father and pattern of all believers. It was faith that led Moses through the Red Sea, and across the desert to the borders of the promised land. It was faith that caused the walls of Jericho to fall before Josue.[2] By faith the judges and prophets "conquered kingdoms, wrought justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, recovered strength from weakness, became valiant in battle, put to flight the armies of foreigners: women received their dead raised to life again".[3] It inspired the martyrs of old when they faced death in all its forms: "They were stoned, they were cut asunder, they were tempted, they were put to death by the sword, they wandered about in sheep-skins, in goat-skins, being in want, distressed, afflicted: of whom the

[1] Heb. xi. 4. [2] Ib. 7, 17, 23, 30.
[3] Ib. 33 *seq.*

world was not worthy".[1] It was faith which led to all this heroism, and caused them to attain such heights of spiritual greatness.

In the Gospels our Lord continually insists both upon its necessity and its power. The phrase used on the occasion of the cure of the two blind men is constantly repeated, "According to your faith, be it done unto you".[2] Or, as was said to the leper, "Thy faith hath made thee whole".[3] The measure of faith is the measure of attainment. It made the prayer of the Syro-Phœnician woman practically irresistible with our Lord. "O woman, great is thy faith: be it done to thee as thou wilt."[4] On one occasion the disciples signally failed to cast out a devil. When they asked the reason, our Lord told them distinctly, "Because of your unbelief". Before He granted the prayer of the demoniac's father, He laid it down, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth".[5]

It is an important lesson given us by our Lord Himself that the limitations of our power for good are to be found only in the limitations of our faith. "Amen, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, Remove from hence hither, and

[1] Heb. xi. 37 *seq.* [2] Matt. ix. 29. [3] Luke xviii. 19.
[4] Matt. xv. 28. [5] Ib. ix. 22.

it shall remove: and nothing shall be impossible to you."[1] Peter's confession of faith at Cesarea Philippi obtained for him the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and his apostolic primacy in the Church. The penitent thief's act of faith upon the cross transformed him from a sinner into a saint, and won for him the immediate gift of paradise.

When the Apostles went forth upon their mission to subdue the world to Jesus Christ, it was by faith that they claimed to triumph over the world's wisdom and its superior material force. "This is the victory which overcometh the world, our faith."[2] St. Paul explains that he "came not in loftiness of speech, or of wisdom. For I judged not myself to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."[3] It was this apostolic faith which enabled the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the strong. Again, it was faith that led the first Christians to make the sacrifice of all things in this world, that they might gain Christ and His grace. Faith was to them the treasure hidden in a field, "which a man having found, for joy thereof, goeth

[1] Matt. XVII. 19—"as a grain of mustard seed," i.e. in its hidden forcefulness and power.

[2] 1 John v. 4. [3] 1 Cor. II. 1, 2.

and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field ".[1] They parted literally with all things in the world to purchase or preserve that treasure. They were keenly alive to its inestimable value, they could suffer no passing advantage, no prize which the world might offer, to defraud them of it.

When the history of the persecution of the early Church was repeated in our own country in centuries not long past, and every form of pain and penalty was imposed upon our Catholic forefathers, they bravely counted the cost, and made the sacrifice of things temporal for the treasure that is eternal. They suffered themselves under the slow pressure of penal laws to be gradually stripped of their ancient possessions, to be brought to poverty and social extinction, when they escaped prison and death. Like the Christians of the first age, they found compensation for every loss in the gift of faith, and the kingdom which it opened to them. Such is faith in its power to accomplish and endure. Such is the strong vital force which it communicates to the inherent weakness of human nature.

II. If, therefore, we endeavour to make practical application to ourselves of all that our Lord and the Apostles tell us concerning the

[1] Matt. xiii. 44.

virtue of faith, we shall find three leading principles clearly set before us for our guidance.

First, Faith is the secret of all fruitfulness in the service of God, whether we labour for ourselves or for others. Success or failure, triumph or disappointment will be just in measurable proportion to the faith which inspires our efforts. Let us bear in mind that on the one occasion when the Apostles failed to do what they attempted, our Lord told them that it was not to any sudden cessation of the power which He had given them, but to the deficiency of their faith that the failure was due. When, moreover, He pointed to a period of spiritual sterility in the latter days of the world, He pointed also to an absence of faith as marking that period. "The Son of Man when He cometh, shall He find, think you, faith on earth?"[1] In a word, while faith has ever been, if we may so speak of it, the driving power in the strenuous lives of those who have accomplished any important work for God, it has also been the secret of the great results that crowned their efforts, and the success which followed their steps. We, too, have our work in life appointed for us in the loving Providence of God. How important, therefore, for us is that petition of the Apostles to our Lord,

[1] Luke xviii. 8.

"Adauge nobis fidem"—"Lord, increase our faith".[1]

Secondly, Faith is the very soul of prayer. Indeed, it must be the animating principle of every act of worship offered to God; if that outward act is to be anything more than an empty form rendering no praise, making no appeal to the mercy of God. Prayer disconnected with faith, of which it ought to be the living expression, is something unreal and dead. The prayer that "availeth much,"[2] to which all the promises are made, to which nothing is impossible, is the prayer of faith.

Hence it follows that those daily exercises of prayer which find their appointed place in our lives should never be allowed to degenerate into an empty repetition of words, but be at all times a real, living, earnest expression of actual and explicit faith. The effort to make prayer a true exercise of faith will invest our prayer with that essential quality which makes it efficacious.

The same applies equally to the manner in which we receive the Sacraments and assist at Mass. The Mass is a sublime act of praise and thanksgiving, of propitiation and petition. Yet, in order that it may have its fruit for us, it must be an act inspired by faith, and the measure of

[1] Luke xvii. 3. [2] James v. 16.

its fruit for us will be the measure of our faith. It is instructive to learn from the Epistle to the Hebrews[1] that it was faith which made the difference between Abel's sacrifice and that of Cain. One of the chroniclers who wrote the history of St. Edmund's life tells of the intensity of his faith in the following words: "In the service of the altar he was ever dissolved in tears, so comporting himself as though he had put off his humanity, and was witnessing the Lord's Passion take place in the flesh".[2] Faith makes the Mass as real to us as the cross was to the penitent thief, and the efficacy of the one equal to that of the other. It finds in the Mass the same treasure of mercy and grace which the most privileged of penitents found in the cross.

Thirdly, Faith is the source of the merit and acceptableness which we desire to find in the discharge of those daily duties that fill up the record of our lives. It bids us seek God in all things, great and small, and acquit ourselves of our common tasks in a manner worthy of Him we serve. It supplies us with the motives which enable us to persevere in spite of difficulties: to disregard the observation of men and the present rewards of success: humbly, secretly,

[1] Heb. xi. 4.

[2] "St. Edmund, Archbishop of Canterbury," Ward, p. 93.

silently to lay up for ourselves treasure with God. It makes us loyal in the fulfilment of our duties towards God, generous in all our relations with our neighbour. It gives strength for sacrifice, if the call to sacrifice should come to us, as it came to Abraham. It can turn commonplace occasions into means of eliciting acts of high perfection. It can render a life just as obscure, as lowly, as hidden from the world as was that of our Lord at Nazareth, full of sublime merit, and more glorious before God than the lives of the most illustrious amongst men.

We need, therefore, to make this spirit of faith penetrate through all the acts and aspects of our daily lives. We need to exercise it in the discharge of the lesser responsibilities of to-day, that we may be the more fully prepared for the weightier responsibilities of to-morrow. In any case, such an exercise will secure us against the bitterness of a final disappointment, and against the danger of finding the days and years of life void of all value when we appear in the presence of the Judge.

Lastly, that we may obtain so important a grace we are bidden to look to Him who is "the author and finisher of faith".[1] He is ever as ready to offer His gift to us as to the Samaritan

[1] Heb. XII. 2.

woman at Jacob's well, "If thou didst know the gift of God, thou wouldst perhaps have asked of Him".[1] In His perpetual Eucharistic presence amongst us, He is as ready to listen to us as to His first disciples, when we repeat their prayer, "Lord, increase our faith". Fitly, therefore, may we make it our constant petition as we appear before Him—

Ave Jesu, Pastor fidelium.
Adauge fidem omnium in Te credentium.

[1] John IV. 10.

XVIII.

THE HOLY EUCHARIST.

A Meditation.

"Memoriam fecit mirabilium suorum misericors et miserator Dominus: escam dedit timentibus se."

"He hath made a remembrance of His wonderful works, being a merciful and gracious Lord: He hath given food to them that fear Him."—Ps. cx. 4.

The Holy Eucharist cannot be better described than in these words of the Psalmist—"the remembrance of His wonderful works" left us by "a merciful and gracious Lord". It contains within itself all previous mysteries: it enshrines all previous wonders of Divine love and mercy, and then, seeming to start from where they have stopped, it brings the majesty of God one long step nearer, nay into actual contact with each soul that He has made. The past is made present. Bethlehem and Calvary are perpetuated, and we are brought as near to these great mysteries of the past as those who first witnessed them. Indeed we are far more than simple witnesses

of great mysteries Divinely continued. We are active recipients of their fruits, which the Holy Eucharist applies to our souls.

In a word, the Holy Eucharist is a Divine means, ordained by Him who loved His own even unto the end, of perpetuating the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption; a means of communicating the life of God to the soul of man; a means of realizing the promise, "Behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world".[1]

It demanded, and may be said to have called into being, the Christian priesthood; and no one can aspire to the priesthood without aspiring to a special bond of union with the Holy Eucharist. For the Holy Eucharist may be said to depend on the priest, much as our Lord on earth depended on Mary and Joseph. The relations between our Lord on the one hand, and His immaculate Mother and St. Joseph on the other, are the type of the relations between our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and the priest who guards and ministers to Him. The position of dependence upon the fidelity and devotion of His creatures, which He assumed in His earthly life towards Mary and Joseph, He assumes in His sacramental life towards His priests. This special bond of union

[1] Matt. xxviii. 20.

with the Blessed Sacrament is the chief glory of the priesthood. But by reason of the intimate relations formed in the Holy Eucharist between God and the soul which He visits, or waits to visit, with the fullness of His presence and His grace, it is evident how fitting is a strong personal devotion towards the Blessed Sacrament in the hearts of all who share in this supreme gift of God.

We may, therefore, reflect upon the Holy Eucharist, first, as the sacrifice of the New Law—the re-presentation of the death of the Lord;[1] secondly, as the sacramental Communion of His body and blood;[2] thirdly, as His abiding presence, or the earthly "tabernacle of God with men".[3]

I. First, let us consider the Holy Eucharist as a sacrifice, being, as it is, the supreme act of all our Christian worship. The solemn rite which follows the Divine model set at the last supper is the repeated presentation of the death of the Lord, in fulfilment of the command, "Do this for a commemoration of Me". St. Paul explains that this act of remembrance or commemoration is the "showing" of "the death of the Lord until He come".[4] Inasmuch as that death was a sacrifice, its solemn celebration is the celebration of a sacrifice; of that, indeed, which was infinite and

[1] 1 Cor. xi. 26. [2] Ib. x. 16.
[3] Apoc. xxi. 3. [4] 1 Cor. xi. 26.

inexhaustible in its merit, to which all the ancient offerings looked forward, to which the far holier Christian mysteries look back. The Mass is a world of wonders in itself, but we will briefly consider it in its one essential aspect.

In all the history of Creation there was one supreme moment when God was duly honoured as God. He was duly worshipped as the Lord of all, claiming full love and adoration from His creature. He was duly thanked for all the favours flowing down from His infinite goodness. He was, above all, duly propitiated as an offended God; and He was duly supplicated as the source of all grace. In that moment when the Lamb of God offered Himself on the altar of the cross to His heavenly Father, all the supreme homage of infinite praise, all the supreme merit of an infinite expiation was offered. In that great sacrifice, there was an infinite abundance of expiation, as it is written, "copiosa apud Eum redemptio,"[1] a plenteous and superabounding redemption; and similarly was there an infinite abundance of praise, of thanksgiving, and of impetration. All the insufficiencies of men and angels were supplied for in that one act.

But our Lord and Master has ordained a means by which that act, so unique, so trans-

[1] Ps. cxxix. 7.

cendent, shall be for ever recalled, by which that supreme offering shall ever be re-presented. Not by any mere type or symbol, but by the actual presence of that same Divine Victim on our Christian altar, and offered by the authority of the same Divine priest who first presented Himself upon the cross, that sacrifice of infinite merit is made to take place from day to day amongst us. That is the fulfilment of the prophet's words, "From the rising of the sun even to the going down, My name is great among the Gentiles and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to My name a clean oblation".[1] It is the offering of the same body that was delivered for us, of the same precious Blood shed for many unto the remission of sins. That supreme act of Calvary is made each day, by means of the Holy Eucharist, no longer a past but a present reality to us.

Because of the sameness of that which is offered on the altar with that which was offered on the cross, it comes to pass that the moment of consecration, followed by the elevation of the Divine Victim, is for practical purposes one with that precious moment when the same Divine Victim hung upon the cross, and first offered Himself without other priestly ministry than His own.

[1] Mal. i. 11.

That happy moment, when the penitent thief so readily found heaven opened to him for the asking, is made present to us, as we bow down before the uplifted host, and our words of prayer need fall nothing short in efficacy of that prayer of Dismas, so immediate in its effect. It would appear to be impossible for our Lord, at that time of His sacrifice, to refuse any earnest supplication made to Him. Is He not doing the same act before us in the Mass as when the thief cried to Him from the cross? Therefore to us the same opportunity is made present, and there is every reason to hope that if we similarly dispose our souls the same happy effects are awaiting our efforts.

When we have brought home to ourselves the fact that the Mass is Calvary made present before us, invisible though the scene be except to the eye of faith, we can understand why the saints set such value on assisting at Mass, as the best of all forms of devotion. We may, perhaps, ask ourselves on the one hand the practical question, Do we make it such an important devotion in our lives as its own greatness demands, and as all our spiritual teachers tell us we should make it? Again, Do we use our opportunity at Mass, and more especially at the solemn moment of sacrifice, with as full an earnestness as possible, so as to

draw fitting fruit from it? We have no right to be satisfied with our efforts until we obtain from the Mass fruit that is, in some degree, commensurate with its greatness.

II. In the second place, the Holy Eucharist is a Sacrament, a Divine banquet. It is a new and supreme revelation of God's love, and of His desire to communicate Himself to His own without measure or limitation. "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end."[1] Here is something in advance even of the mysteries of Bethlehem and Calvary. As the typical lamb of the Passover was not only slain but afterwards eaten, so in the Eucharist the foreshadowings of the ancient type are carried out to their minutest detail. He is offered on the altar as victim, He is received at the Eucharistic table as food.

When He first left heaven, to speak humanly, in order to visit the earth ; when in Zachary's words, "through the bowels of the mercy of our God, the dayspring from on high hath visited us,"[2] He prepared His resting-place within one immaculate creature, whose grace of sinlessness was announced from the beginning of the world. The mind does not shrink from the contemplation of God descending to dwell even in a creature's

[1] John xiii. 1. [2] Luke i. 78.

body, when that chosen resting-place of the Most High is prepared in sinlessness and incorruption. But when the same Adorable Majesty desires, nay, in the urgent insistence of love, demands to come and make a dwelling-place for Himself in the hearts—within these mortal bodies—of all amongst us, then the greatness of this design of infinite love may well stagger all human thought. Surely, Bethlehem's stable with its poverty, its disorder, and litter of poor beasts housed there, is only a feeble picture of the spiritual condition of many a soul into which that Divine Visitor must enter. Nevertheless, love disregards all considerations such as these. It has one fixed end in view, and of that one end it never loses sight. Nothing will divert it in its course. When we call back to our minds that the love we speak of in the Holy Eucharist is infinite, and is freely given to each one of those many souls whom the Victim of the Eucharist first redeemed on the cross, then we are prepared for these further wonders of Divine condescension.

What is this one end of Divine love in the Holy Eucharist? It is to give life, Divine life, to the souls that without Him cannot live—that is the design of God. "I am the bread of life." "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in

you."[1] Exiles in this world, so far as our souls are concerned, we have to carry on a twofold life. One is the life of the home to which we belong, towards which we are journeying, the "patria" of which we sing in the hymn of Benediction. The other is the common life of this land of exile, of our earthly pilgrimage. Who shall bring us draughts of true life from the far-off fountain? David cried out in his need: "O that some man would get me a drink of the water out of the cistern, that is in Bethlehem, by the gate!"[2] Still greater is our need. Who shall give us of that bread which endureth unto life everlasting?

"Our merciful and gracious God," the Psalmist tells us, will give food to them that fear Him. He will give us life at its very source. He will give us Himself, the Author of all life in heaven and on earth. In heaven He will communicate Himself to us in His glory, as the giver of that life which is eternal. But on earth no less really does He communicate Himself to us, that He may impart His own life to our otherwise lifeless souls, and make them live, as it were, by the warmth of His own bosom and the contact of His own heart.

How greatly do we need to receive those

[1] John vi. 48, 54. [2] 2 Kings xxiii. 15.

visitations which are to us the renewal of our true life! The higher our calling, the loftier our duties; the greater our aspirations in His service, the more we need the fresh imparting of that Divine life which it is His desire to give us. Where is the virginal life, that important element in the Church's mark of holiness, to be sought for except in the Holy Eucharist? Whence is the apostolic spirit to be drawn and sustained but from the same inexhaustible source? Where, indeed, is any true, or enduring, or fervent Christian life to be found, but in that Sacrament which brings to us the spring and fountain-head of all life in God Himself? What indeed can be wanting to us when we are made by that gift sharers of the Divine nature? For to the Blessed Sacrament are commonly applied the words of St. Peter, "ut efficiamini divinæ consortes naturæ" —"That ye may be made partakers of the Divine nature".[1]

Here again we may question ourselves as to our practical use of the opportunities of grace that are open to us. Do we actually endeavour, by earnestness and fervent faith, to obtain from our Holy Communions all possible fruit?

III. Lastly, we have to consider the Holy Eucharist as the abiding presence of our Lord

[1] 2 Peter I. 4.

amongst us. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us." St. John's phrase describing the Incarnation has its perpetual realization in the Blessed Sacrament, by which He continues to "tabernacle," as the Greek text expresses it, amongst us.[1] So true is this, that wheresoever His tabernacle is neglected, or dishonoured, or forgotten, the words of the Baptist may be justly applied, "There hath stood One in the midst of you whom you know not".[2]

Whatever inspired words of longing and love the Psalmist used in reference to the mystic tabernacle of the first dispensation are applicable in a far higher sense to the tabernacle of the new Covenant, where the fullness of that living presence begun in Bethlehem is continued unto the consummation of the world. "How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord. . . . Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house, O Lord: they shall praise Thee for ever and ever. . . . Better is one day in Thy courts above thousands."[3]

The Eucharistic tabernacle is, as it were, the audience-chamber of the King. There He awaits our coming at all hours. He never wearies of

[1] ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν. [2] John I. 26.
[3] Ps. LXXXIII. 1, 5, 10.

our demands, or at the recital of our troubles. He feels only the coldness of our neglect and forgetfulness. He is our Benefactor and Counsellor, our Friend, our one true Comforter when all other comfort fails. There He realizes the titles given Him by the prophet,—"His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of peace".[1] There virtue goes out from Him, as when He moved amongst the multitudes in Galilee. There He continues to exercise the ministry of mercy and compassion which He discharged in the brief years of His public life, when He manifested His Divine sympathy with every form of human sorrow. There as the Emmanuel He continues to satisfy the souls of men in their many wants, and to make the privileged intercourse with Him granted to the first disciples the common property of all.

The fruit of a visit paid to Him in the beginning of His ministry, as recorded by St. John, was nothing less than the grace of an apostolic vocation which came to St. Andrew. He was one of the two disciples of St. John the Baptist who heard him speak of Christ as the Lamb of God, "and they followed Jesus. And Jesus turning

[1] Is. IX. 6.

and seeing them following Him, saith to them: What seek you? Who said to Him, Rabbi, where dwellest Thou? He saith to them: Come and see. They came and saw where He abode, and they staid with Him that day."[1] Doubtless there are many similar graces to be traced to similar visits made to the dwelling-place in which He vouchsafes to remain upon our altars. St. Alphonsus, writing on the usefulness of visits to the Blessed Sacrament, says of himself: "Visiting the Blessed Sacrament, which I practised, though with much tepidity and imperfectly, was the means which led me to abandon the world". In other words, it led him, as St. Andrew's visit had led before, to the highest sanctity.

There is something in the silence and peace of the sanctuary, as we enter it out of the tumult of the world, which seems softly to echo the words spoken to the three disciples taken to Gethsemane, "Stay ye here and watch with Me".[2] We know not what crisis may await us, any more than Peter could foresee the spiritual danger suddenly sprung upon him. But it is good to arm ourselves against the uncertainties of life, by watching from time to time with Jesus in the tabernacle. It is an effectual means of drawing a new supply of spiritual strength for mind and heart, that with

[1] John i. 37 *seq.* [2] Matt. xxvi. 38.

the Psalmist we may say, "My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God".[1]

Lastly, it is a useful practice in our visits to the tabernacle to make what is called a spiritual Communion, to beg of Him who dwells there that He may come spiritually into our souls and take possession of them, that He may accompany us as we go forth to the fulfilment of our daily task, that He may assist us in the performance of each duty and prosper the work of our hands. "Et sit splendor Domini Dei nostri super nos, et opera manuum nostrarum dirige super nos, et opus manuum nostrarum dirige"—"And let the brightness of the Lord our God be upon us: and direct Thou the works of our hands over us: yea, the work of our hands do Thou direct".[2]

[1] Ps. LXXXIII. 2. [2] Ib. LXXXIX. 17.

APPENDIX.

THE following contains the more important portions of the Decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Council on receiving daily the Holy Eucharist, 20 December, 1905 :—

1. Frequent and daily Communion, as a thing most earnestly desired by Christ our Lord and by the Catholic Church, should be open to all the faithful, of whatever rank and condition of life; so that no one who is in the state of grace, and who approaches the holy table with a right and devout intention, can lawfully be hindered therefrom.

2. A right intention consists in this: that he who approaches the holy table should do so, not out of routine, or vainglory, or human respect, but for the purpose of pleasing God, of being more closely united with Him by charity, and of seeking this Divine remedy for his weaknesses and defects.

3. Although it is most expedient that those who communicate frequently or daily should be free from venial sins, especially from such as are fully deliberate, and from any affection thereto, nevertheless it is sufficient that they be free from mortal sin, with the purpose of never sinning in future; and, if they have this sincere purpose, it is impossible but that daily

communicants should gradually emancipate themselves even from venial sins, and from all affections thereto.

4. But whereas the Sacraments of the New Law, though they take effect *ex opere operato*, nevertheless produce a greater effect in proportion as the dispositions of the recipient are better, therefore care is to be taken that Holy Communion be preceded by serious preparation, and followed by a suitable thanksgiving, according to each one's strength, circumstances, and duties.

5. That the practice of frequent and daily Communion may be carried out with greater prudence and more abundant merit, the confessor's advice should be asked. Confessors, however, are to be careful not to dissuade any one (*ne quemquam avertant*) from frequent and daily Communion, provided that he is in a state of grace and approaches with a right intention.

6. But since it is plain that by the frequent or daily reception of the Holy Eucharist union with Christ is fostered, the spiritual life more abundantly sustained, the soul more richly endowed with virtues, and an even surer pledge of everlasting happiness bestowed on the recipient, therefore parish priests, confessors, and preachers—in accordance with the approved teaching of the Roman Catechism (Part II, cap. iv. N. 60)—are frequently, and with great zeal, to exhort the faithful to this devout and salutary practice.

7. Frequent and daily Communion is to be promoted especially in religious Orders and Congrega-

tions of all kinds; with regard to which, however, the decree *Quemadmodum*, issued on 17 December, 1890, by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, is to remain in force. It is also to be promoted especially in ecclesiastical seminaries, where students are preparing for the service of the altar; as also in all Christian establishments, of whatever kind, for the training of youth.

8. In the case of religious institutes, whether of solemn or simple vows, in whose rules, or constitutions, or calendars Communion is assigned to certain fixed days, such regulations are to be regarded as *directive* and not *preceptive*. In such cases the appointed number of Communions should be regarded as a minimum, and not as setting a limit to the devotion of the religious. Therefore, freedom of access to the Eucharistic table, whether more frequently or daily, must always be allowed them, according to the principles above laid down in this decree. And in order that all religious of both sexes may clearly understand the provisions of this decree, the Superior of each house is to see that it is read in community in the vernacular, every year within the octave of the Feast of Corpus Christi.

9. Finally, after the publication of this decree, all ecclesiastical writers are to cease from contentious controversies concerning the dispositions requisite for frequent and daily Communion.

All this having been reported to His Holiness Pope Pius X by the undersigned Secretary of the Sacred

Congregation in an audience held on 17 December, 1905, His Holiness ratified and confirmed the present decree, and ordered it to be published, anything to the contrary notwithstanding. He further ordered that it should be sent to all local ordinaries and regular prelates, to be communicated by them to their respective seminaries, parishes, religious institutes, and priests; and that in their reports concerning the state of their respective dioceses or institutes they should inform the Holy See concerning the execution of the matters therein determined.

Decree by which Daily Communicants may gain all Indulgences without being obliged to Confess Weekly.

His Holiness Pope Pius X most earnestly desires that the praiseworthy custom, so very acceptable to God, by which the faithful, in a state of grace and with a right intention, approach daily to Holy Communion, may become more general and may lead to more virtuous lives. For which reason, graciously and gladly receiving the petitions of many persons addressed to him through the most eminent Cardinal Casimir Gennari, he has justly determined to grant a special favour to all those who follow or desire to follow the practice aforesaid.

Pope Clement XIII, of happy memory, by a decree of this Sacred Congregation of the 9th day of December, 1763, granted to all the faithful "who, striving to purify their souls by frequent confession of their sins, were accustomed, unless they were

legitimately hindered, to approach the Sacrament of Penance at least once a week, and were not conscious of having committed any mortal sin since their last confession, the privilege of gaining all indulgences whatsoever, without the actual confession which otherwise would be necessary for gaining them, this concession, however, being in no wise applicable to the indulgences of a jubilee, whether ordinary or extraordinary, or to other indulgences granted in like manner; for which, besides the other works enjoined, sacramental confession must be made within the time prescribed". Now, however, to all the faithful who, being in a state of grace and having a right and devout intention, are accustomed daily to receive the Holy Sacrament of the altar, even if they once or twice in a week omit their daily Communion, our most Holy Father Pius X grants that they may avail themselves of the above-mentioned indult of Clement XIII of happy memory, without the weekly confession which, in other circumstances, is still of obligation for rightly gaining the indulgences that occur during the week. His Holiness, moreover, has graciously declared that this privilege will hold good in future times, anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at Rome, the 14th day of February, 1906.

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